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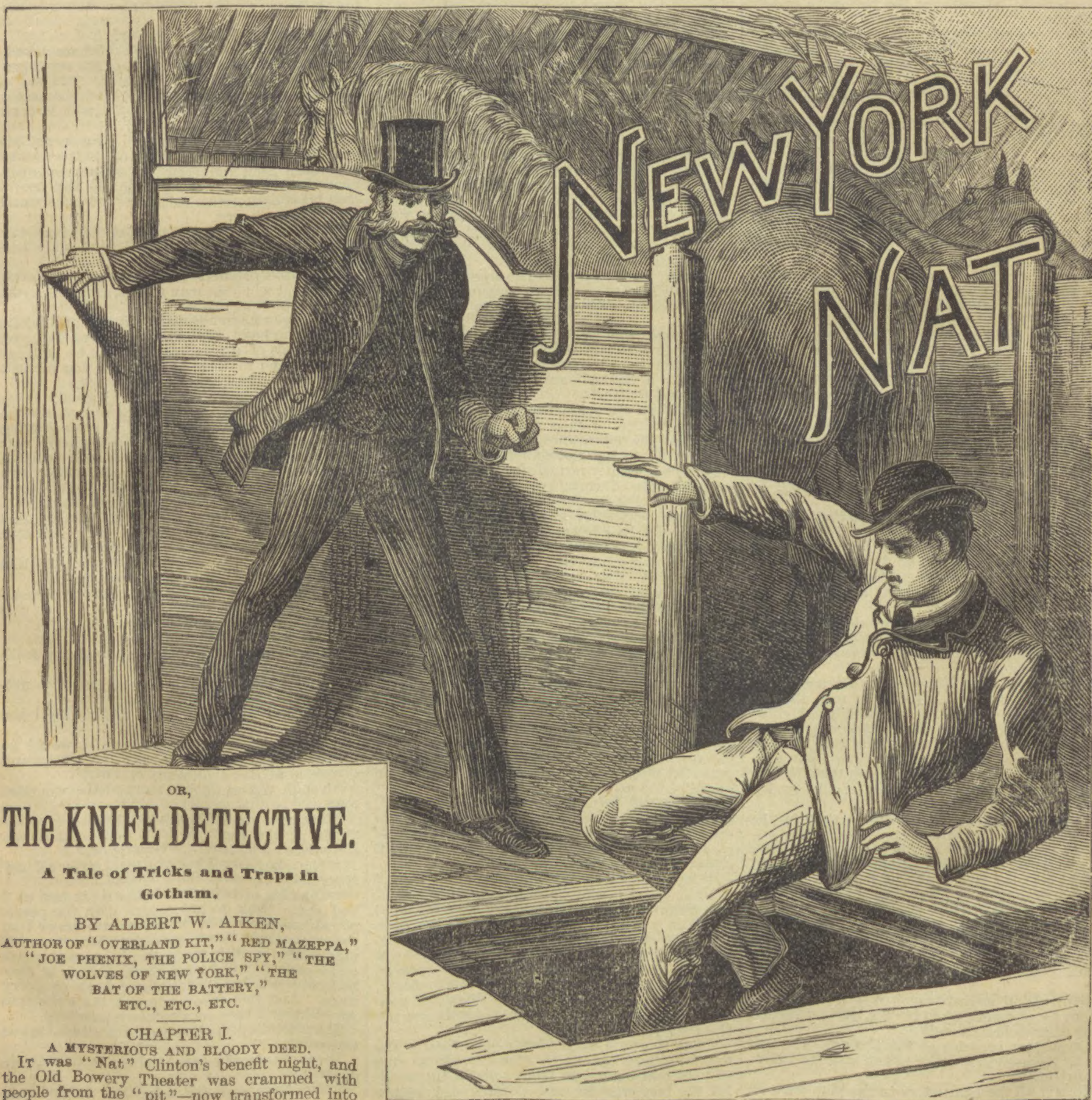
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OR, The KNIFE DETECTIVE.

A Tale of Tricks and Traps in
Gotham.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "OVERLAND KIT," "RED MAZEPPA,"
"JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY," "THE
WOLVES OF NEW YORK," "THE
BAT OF THE BATTERY,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS AND BLOODY DEED.

It was "Nat" Clinton's benefit night, and the Old Bowery Theater was crammed with people from the "pit"—now transformed into a parquet—to the domain of the East-side gam-

"DOWN YOU GO TO DEATH, BLOODHOUND THAT YOU ARE!"

ins, the upper tier, "nigger heaven," to use the slang of the day.

It is of the great metropolis of the New World, lusty Gotham, that we write; the time, some thirty years ago when the Old Bowery Theater was one of the prominent play-houses of the town.

And the Nat Clinton of whom we speak was a young actor, who, in a short time, had made himself almost as great a favorite with the critical East-siders, as the now world-famous comedian George Fox, then the leading light of Purdy's National Theater, the old time "Chatham," which was situated on Chatham street, which is only the lower end of the Bowery, a few blocks from New York's "Old Drury," as the Old Bowery Theater was often called.

But there was this difference between the two actors.

Fox was what is termed a "Low Comedian," that is, the characters in which he appeared were servants, countrymen, and similar fellows who filled a low station in life, while Clinton was an "Eccentric" and "Light Comedian," his roles being dandies, fops, well-born and bred individuals, full of strange peculiarities.

And as the "lines" of the two were so different they could hardly be compared, but though not strictly rivals, yet, as actors, they ran a close race for the favor of the theater-going public.

In personal appearance the two were widely different.

Fox was a sober-faced man who was generally dressed in black and looked more like a methodist minister than a comedian, while Clinton was a young and handsome fellow, about as perfect in both face and form as could be found in a long day's journey.

He was about the medium size, with a well-knit, muscular figure which seemed to give promise of uncommon strength.

And in this respect his appearance did not belie his gifts, for, to use the old expression, he was as spry as a cat and as strong as a lion.

As we have said, Clinton was a handsome fellow, with an oval face, regular features, and a pair of the sharpest, keenest gray eyes that were ever possessed by a mortal.

The actor came of an old New York family, had received an excellent education, thanks to a rich bachelor uncle who had taken a fancy to his handsome, intelligent orphan nephew.

Our hero had been bereft of both his parents at an early age. His father had been a partner in an extensive concern and was generally supposed to be wealthy, but, by some knavish tricks on the part of his associates, after his death it was made to appear that not only had he lost the large sum which he had invested in the concern, but had overdrawn his account and was in debt to the firm some thousands of dollars.

This news came upon the widow with terrible force, and being in feeble health, it helped to precipitate her death.

Then old Van Tromp Clinton, the bachelor uncle to whom were referred, stepped into the lists, resolved that justice should be done to his nephew, for he laughed at the idea that his brother, Mortimer Clinton—Nat's father—the soul of honor, had ever used a single penny which was not justly his.

But the rascally partners evaded justice by taking refuge in flight. The concern was rotten to the core and so it happened that the boy was left penniless.

Clinton had been educated by his uncle, and it was the fond belief of the old man that in some learned profession he would greatly distinguish himself, but, from early youth, the lad had a passion for the stage which could not be controlled and, at last, after a great struggle, the old man came to the conclusion that the boy might as well have his way, and so our hero became an actor.

Possessing marvelous talents in that line, he rose rapidly in the profession until he became, as we have said, one of the greatest favorites that had ever faced the footlights in New York.

And now, on this night of which we write, the Old Bowery was filled with an audience assembled especially to do him honor.

Three plays were on the boards; in the old days no single play satisfied the exacting people who patronized the east-side theaters. And in all three pieces Clinton bore the leading character.

All went off as merry as a wedding bell until about twenty minutes to twelve, just as the last play approached its end.

On such an occasion as this the actors had to bestir themselves in order to get through before midnight.

Nearly all the characters in the play were on

the stage in readiness for the wind-up of the drama, our hero in the center, when there was a slight confusion in the front rows of the pit.

Two men there became engaged, in an altercation, one struck the other, and then in a second both were clinched in a furious struggle.

Immediately the house was in an uproar, and the actors upon the stage were forced to suspend operations.

The neighbors of the two endeavored to separate them, and Clinton, who was gifted with eyes of uncommon powers, hastened to the footlights, anxious to lend assistance, for he had detected the glitter of a knife in the hand of one of the combatants.

And then, just as the actor was about to cry out in warning, in shrill tones came the announcement:

"Oh, heavens, I am stabbed!"

"Look out! seize the man who has the knife!" cried the actor.

The audience had been in a tumult before, but now they seemed to fairly go wild; and those in the neighborhood of the antagonists fairly lost their heads, and began to lay hold of one another.

Taking advantage of this confusion the man, who had struck the blow, ducked to the floor and managed to squeeze, eel-like, through the crowd.

Clinton, from his elevated position upon the stage, distinctly saw the movement and caught a glimpse of the man's face.

When the cry was raised that one of the audience had been killed, the stage-manager, in a panic, ordered the curtain to be rung down, for he rightly calculated that after such a tragedy had been enacted the audience would not care to see any more of the mimic life.

With the descent of the curtain the audience began to pour out of the theater. The police made their way to the side of the wounded man and he was carried through the orchestra door, under the stage, into the green-room.

And a dozen of the men who had been in the immediate neighborhood of the sufferer were "collared" by the police, despite their indignant remonstrances, in the hope that some one of them might be the assassin.

Clinton, who happened to be assuming a character which wore a modern costume, was able to be present without having to change his dress.

The men who had been arrested were in custody just outside the green-room, while the police captain of the precinct, who happened by luck to be in the audience, proceeded to question the wounded man.

The victim was middle-aged, rather rough in his appearance, with a full beard, and had somewhat the appearance of a sailor, although he was well, though not elaborately dressed.

He was evidently no idler for his hands showed evidence of hard work.

Fate willed that a prominent east-side doctor, who was a particular friend of the police captain, should be present in the company of the official on this occasion, and so his services were at once brought into use.

And while the doctor was examining the wounded man, the young actor took a rapid survey of the men who had been detained by the police.

He had caught such a clear and distinct view of the face of the man in whose hand he had seen the knife glitter, that he felt certain he would be able to identify the slayer again, no matter under what circumstances he encountered him.

The police captain and the young actor were standing just inside the door which led to the green room, and the suspected men were congregated only a few yards distant, under the guard of the policemen.

Clinton and the officers were well-acquainted, for the captain had been an old chum of the actor's father, so the young man felt free to speak more frankly than perhaps he would otherwise have done.

"Captain, you haven't got the right man," Clinton observed quietly to the police official.

"What makes you jump to that conclusion? What do you know about it?" the officer asked.

"I was close to the footlights when the trouble took place, and having eyes like a hawk, saw the knife in the hands of the murderer, although I didn't really see the blow struck, for the two men were clinched in such a way that it was impossible for any one to see it," the actor replied.

"But I got a good view of the face of the man who had the knife, and I would be able to pick him out again from amid a thousand, for the face was an odd, peculiar one, rather

small features, finely cut, with a swarthy complexion, and a decidedly foreign look."

"Aha!" exclaimed Captain Murphy, "with such a clew as that to go upon we will be certain to catch the rascal!"

"Come in, captain, this is a fatal case, the man hasn't an hour of life left," the doctor announced at this moment.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE officer looked grave as he advanced to the side of the stricken man, who was stretched out at full length upon one of the sofas in the green-room, a couch which had felt the impress of the limbs of all sorts and kinds of people from kings and queens down to bootblacks and stage-sweeper, mimic representatives, of course.

"Got a note-book and a pencil with you?" the captain asked Clinton as the two advanced.

"Yes."

"Take down his statement will you, that is, if we can get him to make one?"

The worthy officer was one of the best men on the force, but he was not at all gifted in a clerical way; he had received a good enough education, but his talents did not lie in that direction, and he had the reputation of writing the worst hand of any captain on the force. Therefore his wish to get some one else to take down the dying statement of the injured man was only natural.

"Certainly," replied the actor.

"The wound is mortal," the doctor remarked, as the two advanced to the side of the sofa upon which the wounded man reposed. "It was a terrible cut and there isn't the least chance for him. In fact, I don't believe he will last an hour."

At this moment the wounded man opened his eyes and looked in the faces of the three who bent over him, and from the expression upon his countenance it was apparent he had recovered his consciousness sufficiently to understand what had been said.

"I'm down to the bed-rock, eh?" the sufferer asked, in faint tones, for the loss of blood had sapped his strength.

All of the listeners, being men of the world, understood what the man meant, despite the odd way in which he put it.

"Yes, you have not many minutes of life left, and, if you have any earthly matters that you are desirous of arranging it would be well for you to attend to them at once for you haven't any time to spare," the doctor replied.

"Oh, this is rough," the man groaned.

"This is just the roughest kind of luck, and no mistake!" he continued. "Here, after slaving for years, I come back to the town where I was born with a pocket full of rocks—money enough to make the eyes of the people who used to turn up their noses at me, start right out of their heads with wonder, and the very first night I strike the town I get a knife put into me, and from the way it feels I reckon the fellow cut a hole big enough to drive a mule through."

"Well, you have received a wound which is certainly mortal," the doctor remarked.

"And in such a case I don't believe in concealing the truth from a man."

"Ain't got much of a hold on life, eh?"

"Not much."

"Can't spit on my hands and take a fresh grip?"

"You hav'n't got one chance out of a million."

"One out of a million is mighty big odds, doctor."

"Yes; I know it, but perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that you hav'n't got any chance at all, for that is my opinion."

"Tough old outlook!" moaned the wounded man.

"Yes, you are liable to pass away at any moment; at the most, I don't believe that you have over an hour of life before you."

"The roughest kind of a deal, after all my struggles," observed the wounded man.

"The idea of being stuck like a pig just as I had come back to get square with the purse-proud wretches who trampled me under foot years ago and drove me to California; and, maybe this is their work, too, because they are quite capable of putting up such a job if they had got wind that I was coming back to worry them. And this fellow who put the knife into me—I know I have seen before somewhere."

The police captain listened with all his ears at this point.

His professional rogue-catching instincts were aroused.

"You have seen the man that stabbed you

before, then—he was not a stranger to you?" he inquired.

"Oh, no; now I come to think of it, the cuss was on the same train with me from Frisco. I thought to-night, when he came and sat down 'side of me, that I had seen him somewhere before; but I didn't take the trouble to put my mind on the matter, for I reckoned it didn't make no difference nohow.

"You see, I didn't have any suspicion that he was a-laying for me, or else I would have been on the lookout for him, for no man ever went gunning for me up at the mines that didn't get as good as he sent, and a trifle better, too, in the bargain."

"You don't know the man's name?"

"Oh, no; but I would know the cuss again if I met him anywhere this side of blazes," responded the sufferer, with a fierce intonation.

"We have arrested some men on suspicion, and perhaps it would be as well for you to take a look at them," the officer remarked. "It may be possible that we have got hold of the right party, although every man Jack of them swears that he isn't the fellow."

"Run 'em in," said the wounded man, "for I haven't got any time to lose, if the medical sharp here knows his business."

"Well, I don't think that there is much doubt about the matter, although, as you appear to be a man of extra strength, you may be able to hold on to life longer than an ordinary man," the doctor remarked.

Captain Murphy gave orders to have the prisoners brought into the room, and one by one they were marshaled before the wounded man for his inspection.

But as man after man passed before him he shook his head, much to the delight of the prisoners, who were all inspired with a secret fear that the injured man might by some mistake denounce the innocent.

Captain Murphy was disappointed, although he had been in a measure prepared for just such a result by the declaration made to him by the young actor.

The prisoners were discharged, greatly to their relief. The ambulance arrived, and the wounded man was conveyed to the hospital, accompanied by the police captain, the doctor, and the young actor.

After being safely deposited in the hospital, and a restorative administered, the man made his statement, which Clinton took down in writing.

It ran as follows:

"My name is Edward Bellwinkle. I am a native of New York, but for the last twenty years have resided in California. Am married; wife's name is Alida, and she lives—or did live, at Washington Heights. I have not seen her for twenty years, but have seen her name in the newspapers once in a while, and so know that she is living. She is not known as Mrs. Bellwinkle, but by her maiden name of Alida Beekman. We were secretly married, and her parents took her away from me right after our marriage, but the marriage has never been annulled, as far as I know.

"After the Beekmans got my wife away, they made New York so hot for me that I was glad to get out, and I went to California.

"There I had all sorts of ups and downs, made money one year and lost it the next, but at last I struck it rich, and when I found myself with a cool fifty thousand dollars in good, hard cash, I made up my mind to return to New York and get square with the arrogant, big-bug beggars, for the Beekmans ain't much more, who drove me away.

"I was foolish enough to boast one night in a Frisco saloon, when I had too much liquor aboard, of what I was going to do after I struck New York, and I am pretty certain that this swarthy-faced, foreign-looking fellow, who put the knife into me to-night, was in the saloon at the time.

"As he sat alongside of me in the theater, the idea came into my head that I had seen him in Frisco, and though at the time I couldn't exactly place him, yet I was sure I wasn't mistaken.

"I don't think I should have noticed the fellow, only I saw that he was watching me, and that set me to thinking; and as I'm a sort of a right, straightforward cuss, I blurted out that I reckoned I had seen him before, and asked if he wasn't from Frisco.

"This seemed to r'ile him; I s'pose because he suspected I was dropping to his little game, and he brought on a difficulty right away by telling me that I was a blasted liar.

"Well, I ain't so young as I once was, but I don't allow no man to call me a liar, and I took

him by the throat at once, and he out with a knife, which he must have had all ready, and stuck it into me so quick that I hardly knew what hurt me.

"That is the whole story, and it is my firm belief that the scoundrel dogged me all the way from San Francisco for the express purpose of getting a chance to kill me; and though I ain't got any proof of it, yet I firmly believe that these miserable hounds who got my wife away from me twenty years ago, these infernal Beekmans put up the job on me."

At this point the man's strength failed him, and he sunk back upon the pillow.

Captain Murphy, acting upon the doctor's advice, had proceeded to take the statement of the wounded man without waiting for the arrival of the coroner, who had been sent for when it became apparent that the victim had received a mortal hurt.

For the medical gentleman had said that the man was likely to expire at any moment, and, of course, it would not do to waste time in waiting for the coroner to arrive.

The doctor's calculation had been an accurate one, for in five minutes after he had finished his statement, Bellwinkle, with a deep groan, turned upon his side and died.

The young actor had carefully noted down the words of the victim, and the doctor and police captain witnessed the statement.

Ten minutes after the death of the wounded man the coroner arrived.

He was a fine specimen of the descendants of the old patroon families, and prided himself upon the fact that his ancestors had been among the first settlers of Manhattan island.

And when he read the statement that the murdered man had made, he became indignant at the slander, as he termed it.

Nick Roosevelt, as the coroner was named, was an outspoken man, and seldom hesitated to free his mind in regard to any subject in which he took an interest.

And being a large, portly man, with a tremendous voice, his words generally made an impression.

"This is all a lie, and this man is crazy!" he exclaimed. "I know all about it. I lived right in the neighborhood when the thing happened, and it was just about twenty years ago, as this dead rascal says!" he continued, with a contemptuous gesture toward the body.

"The Beekmans at that time held their heads up high—they were worth money, lots of it, and this rascal was their gardener.

"They only had one child, a fine girl named Alida, but she was not as smart as she was beautiful, and she allowed this fellow to make a fool of her.

"He was a young, good-looking rascal then, and the girl was idiot enough to run off and get married to him.

"The father, old Colonel Beekman, was furious, and swore he would shoot the scoundrel, who had decoyed away his child, on sight, but some of his friends, who were posted in regard to the law, showed him how he could make it warm for the rascal.

"The girl had taken her valuable jewelry with her, and by a mistake had included some of her mother's jewels in the package, and the elopement had been so arranged that this Bellwinkle had gone to the girl's room and got the jewelry for her; but as he made a mistake, and also took the articles belonging to the mother, there was a chance to lay him by the heels on a charge of stealing.

"Then, too, by the time that the couple were followed and arrested, the girl had reflected upon the matter and, being rather feeble-minded, came to the conclusion she had made a fool of herself and was quite willing to return to her home.

"This fellow was interviewed and given his choice between going to jail and standing trial for the theft of the jewelry, or getting out of the country under a promise never to return.

"He saw he was in a tight place, so he made himself scarce and everybody thought he was dead long ago."

"A regular romance," Captain Murphy remarked.

"Yes, and the queerest thing about the matter, is that no divorce was ever obtained," the coroner observed.

"In some way the rascal managed to fool a Catholic priest into marrying him to the girl; she was a strict Catholic, like all the rest of her family, and, in that religion, you know, they don't go much on divorces, and so she is still his legal wife—or widow, rather, and if the fellow has any money she is his heir—she and her daughter the issue of the marriage."

"There's a daughter, then?" Clinton observed.

"Why, that still more complicates matters."

"Well, there was a daughter, ten years ago," the coroner replied. "She was a beautiful little girl, eight or nine years old then, but, of course, I don't know whether she is alive or dead now, or the mother either, for that matter. I lost sight of the family just about that time, and hav'n't kept track of them, except that I saw the notice of the deaths of the old man and his wife in one of the newspapers.

"In his old age he had been induced to speculate, and had the misfortune to lose all his money.

"Unable to bear this disaster, he had moved away from Washington Heights, and I heard it said that he was living in very poor quarters down-town somewhere."

"Then the idea of this man that he owed his death to the malice of the Beekmans is utterly without foundation?" the police captain observed, thoughtfully.

"Entirely so!" the coroner responded, decidedly. "In the first place the father and mother, who were the ones who went for him so energetically years ago, when he ran away with their daughter, have been in their graves for ten years. The wife and daughter wouldn't be apt to wish to do him harm, particularly when he was coming home rich from California.

"As well as I can make out from this man's story the chances are big that neither one of them had any idea he was in the land of the living," Captain Murphy observed, thoughtfully, as he reflected upon the matter.

"Yes, I don't think there is the least doubt about that," Roosevelt replied. "And, as far as I know, the wife and daughter may be dead too. As I told you I haven't heard anything of the family since the old man ran through his property and cleared out except the brief notice of the death of the old couple.

"But this man's idea that the Beekmans had anything to do with his death is utterly absurd on the face of it, and I don't see what good it will do to make it public. The Beekmans are an old family, well-connected, and to allow this ridiculous yarn to get into the newspapers would only give pain."

"Oh, there isn't the least use of giving it away," the police captain observed. "These newspaper chaps are always poking their noses where they don't belong, and many a time by sticking their yarns into the papers they give warning to some man who is 'wanted' and he skips before we can get hold of him. If the reporter had kept quiet we could have nabbed the bird without any difficulty."

From this speech it will be seen that, excellent officer as Captain Murphy was, yet he had the prejudice against newspaper reporters so common among men on the force, who are seldom willing to admit that any good can be found in the indefatigable journalist.

"We can keep the matter to ourselves, for it is clear that his statement that the Beekmans had anything to do with his murder is away off," the coroner remarked.

"No doubt about it," Captain Murphy assented. "We'll keep the matter quiet and I'll put the detectives on the scent, although I don't believe that it will be of much use, for we have little to go on."

"If I saw the man who did the stabbing I could easily identify him," the young actor remarked. "I got a good view of his face from the stage and saw the glitter of the knife in his hand."

"Now if you was only a detective you would be the very man to go into this thing," the coroner remarked.

"Yes, it's a pity you wasn't, for with your talents as an actor you would make a tip-top detective; you would be able to assume any kind of a disguise and no one could detect that you wasn't the real article," the officer observed.

"Hang me if I don't try it!" Clinton observed. "This is the last night of my engagement and I did not intend to do any more acting until the fall. Who knows? I may develop such talent in the detective line that it will pay me better to follow that business than the stage."

This was intended as a joke, and the others took it as such, for Clinton, like all popular actors, was supposed to make about ten times as much money as he really did.

After the usual formalities were gone through the three departed, the coroner hurrying away to attend to another case, and the captain and the actor going together.

The officer had been reflecting in regard to the best course to be pursued in order to apprehend the murderer, but the matter was shrouded in

such mystery that he was fairly at his wits' end, and knew not how to proceed, and he said as much to his companion.

"I would like to give you a 'pointer' about this job, Clinton," he said, "but I'll have to own up that I can't do it. There ain't the least bit of a clew. In fact, you know more about the thing than I do, for you caught sight of the fellow's face, and that is more than any one else did, for the trick was done so suddenly that the assassin managed to get out of the way almost before any one knew what was up."

"Don't you think it is worth while to hunt up this wife and daughter?" the young actor asked. "Under the circumstances it doesn't seem as if they could possibly have had anything to do with the matter, but, still, they are the only ones who, apparently, will profit by the death of the man, and I believe it is sound detective logic in all cases of murder, to first ascertain who has most to gain by the death of the victim."

"Yes, that is about it. I see you are pretty well posted in the detective line. But, in the case of a simple assault, which I am inclined to think this is, despite the man's story, that thing won't work," the police captain replied.

And then, after a few minutes' silence he added:

"Well, it is too late to-night to do anything, anyway. Come to the police station somewhere around ten in the morning; I will be at leisure then and we can talk the matter over. In the mean time we can cogitate about the thing, and, maybe, get hold of some ideas."

One of the "all night" cabs happening to pass at that moment, they engaged it and were driven to the corner of Canal street and the Bowery where the cab was dismissed, the two men bid each other "good-night" and then went on in their separate ways.

The captain to his police station, and the young actor to his abiding-place which was on Grand street near Elizabeth.

It was Clinton's usual custom at the close of the performances when he came out of the "back door" of the theater—the door used by the actors and working stage people to gain access to the stage department—to go straight up Elizabeth street to Grand; the stage door of the Old Bowery is on Elizabeth street, and, on this occasion, involuntarily as it were, he went down Canal to Elizabeth, thus taking the homeward route to which he was accustomed, although the Bowery was much the pleasantest way at such an hour.

It was fate, though, which guided the actor's footsteps

CHAPTER II.

THE ASSAULT.

As Clinton turned from Canal street into Elizabeth, he was struck by the gloomy darkness which prevailed in the lesser thoroughfare, although he was accustomed to traverse it every night at a late hour, and ought, by this time, to be pretty well used to the solitude which envelops the street when the midnight hour is near.

But, on this occasion, the neighborhood seemed to be more gloomy and desolate than ever.

There was not a light visible, and Clinton, although as bold as a lion and used to the by-streets of the metropolis from boyhood by both day and night, felt a little nervous, an apprehension that danger lurked in his path took possession of him.

At first he was inclined to laugh at the feeling.

And with reason, for though he did not carry a weapon bigger than a penknife, yet he could amply take care of himself, as he was a small Hercules in his muscular development, noted for being a wonderfully good wrestler and as a boxer could hold his own with any man who had ever "put up his dukes"—to use the expression dear to the heart of the fancy—on the east side of town, within thirty pounds of his weight; with the foils, too, he was a match for the best fencer to be found in any of the German Turner associations.

The young actor also was one of those kind of men who are seldom caught napping.

He was always on the lookout, and at present particularly, having a presentiment of danger, every sense was on the alert.

His hearing was strained so that not a sound escaped him, his eyes roved through every dark corner, looking for some shadowy figure lurking there.

But nothing occurred to confirm the apprehensions which had so suddenly seized upon him until after he passed Hester street and had gone half-way down the block which intervenes between Hester and Grand streets.

Then he fancied he detected a dark figure

skulking in a deep doorway on the same side of the street upon which he was advancing.

The shadowy outline looked like a man and, unless it was a police officer who had selected the doorway for the purpose of enjoying a quiet nap, there was little doubt that the fellow wasn't lurking there for any good purpose.

It was not likely the figure was that of a policeman, for an officer who wanted to take a few winks on the sly would have more sense than to select a spot so exposed to observation.

In the actor's opinion, the chances were great that the fellow was a footpad, on the watch for prey, and he prepared himself accordingly.

His anticipation was correct, for when he came to the spot the dark shadow stepped abruptly forth from the dense gloom of the doorway and a tall, gaunt-looking fellow, poorly clad, stood revealed.

There was a desperate look upon the man's face, and his hollow eyes shone with an unnatural light.

"Stranger, I want to beg a few coppers to get something to eat, for I am starving!" he exclaimed, his tone a strange mixture of entreaty and menace.

Clinton was somewhat taken by surprise for this was not exactly what he had expected.

The man was a beggar, but one who, if his petition was rejected, would be apt to use force to gain the money which was as alms refused.

"A few coppers, eh?" said Clinton, looking curiously into the man's face, with the idea of discovering what sort of a customer he had to deal with.

"Yes, I am starving, and there ain't any lie about it, either!" the man exclaimed, hoarsely.

"Well, you certainly look as if it wouldn't do you any harm to get outside of a good beefsteak," the young actor observed.

"Don't talk to me about beefsteaks or you will drive me crazy, and then I will be apt to hurt you, and, Heaven knows, I don't want to do that, but a hungry man ain't apt to be particular!"

"I see, my friend; I appreciate the situation, and I have no doubt that if I was not inclined to grant your request you would be apt to use violence."

"You would do the same if you were in my place!" the man retorted. "It is only human nature. I am desperate, and I must have food, honestly if I can get it, but if I can't, then, I must get it some other way," and as proof that he meant what he said, the man raised his right hand, which he had kept close by his side, and the young actor's eyes caught the flash of a dagger.

A thrill passed through his form, not at the sight of the cold steel, for he possessed too much courage to quail at a view of a bit of shining metal, but because the dagger was a strange, odd-shaped one, and seemed to glitter exactly like the weapon which his eyes had witnessed flash in the hand of the stranger who had murdered the unfortunate Bellwinkle.

Of course it seemed to be an utter impossibility that the dagger could be the same, but this second knife strangely resembled the first.

"See here, my friend, if I did not choose to help you, the little instrument you display there wouldn't be of the slightest use in the premises," Clinton said, in the calmest possible manner.

"You are a bigger man than I am, but, as I rather pride myself on my muscular abilities, I doubt very much if you are a better one and if we come to a slugging match, it isn't dollars to cents that you would get the best of it!"

"Give me money or I'll cut your heart out!" cried the stranger, apparently yielding to a sudden fit of desperation.

"Take care what you are about!" exclaimed the young actor, retreating a step.

"Money, money!" cried the other, and then, with all the fury of a wild beast, he precipitated himself upon the young actor.

Warned by the look in the eyes of his assailant that he meditated an attack, Clinton was prepared for the onset.

The fellow evidently did not want to use the knife, except as a menace—his idea being to frighten the man whom he had selected for a victim, so that he wouldn't attempt to resist his demand.

He rushed upon the young actor, brandishing the knife in his right hand, while he attempted to seize him by the throat with the left.

Clinton, with a quick, upward movement of his right arm, defeated the stranger's attempt upon his throat, and before the fellow comprehended his game, with his left hand he pinioned the wrist, the hand of which clutched the knife, his right grasped the man by the collar, and, closing in with him, with a dextrous twist he

wrested the fellow's feet from the earth and pressed him over backward, adding his own weight to the fall.

Down the man went without the least difficulty, for though he was seemingly possessed of bone and muscle enough to make a good fight against a much larger man than the young actor, yet in his hands he was as helpless as a sixteen-year-old boy.

The fellow seemed to be half-stunned by the shock of his downfall, and Clinton took advantage of this fact to wrest the dagger from him; and then, satisfied that he had taught the fellow a lesson he would not be apt to forget, the young actor rose to his feet, retaining the knife in his hand and examining it with great curiosity.

It was about the oddest thing in the way of a dagger he had ever seen. Evidently a home-made weapon, hammered out of a piece of steel, more like an oyster-knife than anything else, but only half as heavy and about one-third longer.

"Of course the idea is ridiculous," the actor murmured to himself as he examined the knife, while the stranger was slowly rising to his feet, "but when this tool glistened in his hand, it looked like the weapon with which Bellwinkle was killed."

By this time the other was on his feet, and folding his arms across his chest, he scowlingly surveyed his conqueror.

"Well, my friend, you see you didn't work the trick quite as well as you expected," the actor remarked.

There was something about the man that interested Clinton.

He was no common footpad, that was evident; no New York rough who lived upon what he gained by his nightly prowls.

He looked like a man who had seen better days, and though now plainly in "hard luck," yet there was that about him which seemed to say he was a man who came of good people and who had been well brought up.

"I was a fool to try it," the stranger answered. "I am weak and faint for lack of food—utterly desperate; and now, the quicker you give the alarm and deliver me over to the police, the better."

"Oh, no; I don't intend to do anything of the sort," the young actor replied.

"What good would it do me to have you locked up?"

"Why, I would have robbed you if I had been able."

"Well, you didn't do it, so that is all right. I don't bear any malice; but I say, you don't seem to be the sort of man to follow this kind of a trade. You are no street rough, who depends upon robbery for a living."

"No, but I'm a bad egg for all that," the other responded. "Did you ever hear of Hank Mel-drum, the counterfeiter?"

"Yes, I think I have."

"Well, I am the man. I'm desperate, you see, and I don't care who knows me. For the last year, ever since I was released from prison, I have tried to lead an honest life, but both fate and man have been against me. I have lost the cunning which I once possessed. My right hand cannot execute the work as it used to do, and not only that, but my evil reputation has followed me."

"Just as soon as I got fairly settled in a place some one would 'blow the gaff' on me, and when it was discovered that I was a State Prison bird who had been sent to the stone-jug about as many times as I have fingers and toes, nobody wanted me, and so I have about come to the conclusion that if I can't live among honest folks I might as well go back to the cross coves again!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Clinton, "you are the very man I want. I'm going into the detective line and I need a man who is posted."

"Well, I am that. I know about all of them. That knife you have in your hand I made for the biggest rascal there is in the country."

CHAPTER IV.

A MASTER SCOUNDREL.

THIS was startling intelligence, and Clinton surveyed the knife with increased curiosity.

"Yes, sir, it is the truth I'm telling you. I am a Jack-of-all-trades, and can work in iron about as well as the average blacksmith," the other remarked.

"The way I came to make this dagger was really curious. I was in Ohio engaged in 'shoving the queer'—passing counterfeit money, you know—and while traveling around came one

day to a railroad junction, where I had to change cars and wait some time for a train. All there was to the junction was the railroad shed, a saloon and a blacksmith shop. There wasn't even a depot there, nothing but a shed with a couple of benches in it, no ticket-office or depot-master."

"Yes, I have seen just such places out West," the young actor remarked.

"When I got off my train I found the shed in possession of a stoutly-built man, roughly dressed, with a full, brown beard, who looked like a stockman.

"I got into conversation with him and found he was waiting for the same train I designed to take. He seemed to be a jolly, innocent sort of chap, and I was just wondering if I couldn't work off a big 'flimsy'—a bill, you know—on him, when he paved the way to just such a transaction by asking me if I could give him a large bill for small ones."

"You jumped at the chance, of course?"

"You bet! I 'planted' a hundred dollar queer on him right away, getting twenty fives in exchange, and as he seemed to have plenty of money in his capacious pocketbook, I was just going to suggest I could accommodate him with another hundred, when I happened to take a good look at the bills he had given me, and, you can bet your life, I was astonished to discover that the fives were just as queer as the hundred I had shoved off on him."

"I see; it was a case of dog eat dog," the actor suggested.

"Blamed if it wasn't," Meldrum replied.

"The fellow had his eyes on me, and seeing I had made the discovery that the bills were bad, burst into a loud laugh.

"Thought you had picked up a sucker, didn't you?" he exclaimed. "Well, Hank Meldrum, you never made a bigger mistake in your life, and you can bet all you are worth on it, too!"

"He knew me, although I didn't know him, but when he said his name was Talmon Macard I knew him immediately, for his reputation was great. He was a very king of rogues—a man who could assume all sorts of disguises, and was at home in all branches of the 'profession,' from a ten-thousand-dollar job, like cracking a bank safe, to shoving the 'queer' on the country gillies."

"I think I have heard of such a man," Clinton observed, thoughtfully.

"No doubt of it, if you have done much newspaper reading in the last ten years, for during that time he has figured extensively in the police reports. But he is such a cunning rascal that the detectives have never been able to convict him, although he has been arrested twenty times at least on suspicion.

"He is a smart fellow, and is a great hand for a joke; and having recognized me as a brother professional, he thought it would be a fine joke to make me think he was a countryman, and fool me into the idea that I was getting hold of a hundred ducats.

"Having nothing better to do we strolled over to the blacksmith shop, while we were waiting, and there I happened to remark that I could do a little in that line, whereupon Macard chose to doubt it, and picking up a piece of steel, challenged me to make a paper-knife, as he termed it, out of the material."

"He meant a dagger, of course," Clinton remarked.

"Yes, I understood that; and I guessed exactly what kind of a tool he had in his mind.

"He wanted a slender-bladed knife, strong enough to use to force open the lock of a desk and that, at a pinch, would do for an offensive weapon."

"And this was the knife you made?" Clinton asked, indicating the peculiar weapon he held in his hand.

"Yes, and he was much pleased at the manner in which I did the job. I gave him the knife, and on the train we parted. That was five years ago, and I have never seen him since."

"How comes it that the knife is in your possession, then?" Clinton asked.

"By the strangest accident in the world. I found it in the gutter just by the corner of Hester street and Elizabeth about ten minutes ago."

The heart of the young actor gave a great leap as these words reached his ears.

"You found it?" he exclaimed, and as he spoke the thought ran through his mind that his idea that the knife was like the one the assassin had used upon Bellwinkle was not so far out of the way, after all.

The murderer, after escaping from the theater, was seized with the fear that he might

be apprehended, although he had apparently thrown his pursuers off the track; had judged it wise to get rid of the knife, lest it might be found upon him and be identified as the weapon which let out the life of his victim.

"Yes, I was walking along with my eyes bent on the ground, hoping that I might be lucky enough to pick up some small piece of money, so I could get something to eat and a bed for the night, and I saw the glitter of the end of the blade sticking out of the mud.

"I felt sure it was a bit of money when I saw the steel shine and I darted at it as a hawk darts on its prey; I suppose you understand I was a thoroughly astonished man when I made the discovery that it was the knife I had made for Talmon Macard over five years ago."

The young actor felt sure he had a clew to the assassin now, despite the fact that, apparently, the murderer had made his escape without leaving any trace, but he wanted to clinch the matter so he would feel sure that there wasn't any mistake about it.

"But are you certain that this is the same knife?" Clinton asked.

"You know it is possible that some other man might have made a tool under like circumstances."

"Oh yes, I know that, but there is a mark on the knife by which I can identify it, and it is almost out of the bounds of probability that anybody else could have made just such a knife and put just such a mark upon it.

"Look at the end of the handle and you will see a little gleam of copper there."

"Yes, I can plainly distinguish it," the actor remarked, after making the inspection.

"That is a small, copper cent, which by way of a joke, I closed up in the handle when I was finishing the tool. I told Macard that I had marked the knife so I would know it again if I ever saw it.

"He laughed and observed that I had better be careful what I was about, for such a thing as that might get a man hanged some day."

The words seemed prophetic, for, if Clinton's suspicion was correct that the owner of the knife had done the bloody deed, and he was successful in his attempt to bring the criminal to justice, then the knife would surely be the means of putting the hangman's noose around the neck of its owner.

The young actor hesitated for a moment before he spoke.

Was it wise to trust the secret to this unfortunate wreck of a man?

A moment's reflection convinced him that it was. By the aid of the old counterfeiter, who undoubtedly, was acquainted with rascals of all grades, he would be able to track the murderer down and apprehend him.

"This circumstance of your finding the knife seems to me like an act of Providence," he said.

"For, unless I am greatly mistaken, this Macard killed a man with the weapon in the Old Bowery theater about two hours ago."

Meldrum was amazed at the statement, and then Clinton related all that had taken place.

"Is Macard anything like the man who struck the blow?" the actor asked in conclusion.

The other shook his head.

"That is a question which is not easy to answer," he replied. "I never saw Macard but once—the time I made the knife for him, and then he was disguised and presented a perfect representation of a farmer or stockman. What he really looks like, when he is not disguised, I cannot tell."

"If it was Macard who struck the fatal blow the chances are great that he was disguised tonight," Clinton observed, thoughtfully.

"For the man who did the deed looked like a foreigner. He had dark hair and a swarthy skin."

"A disguise, no doubt!" the old counterfeiter exclaimed.

"Although the only time I have ever met Macard was on the occasion as I have told you, yet by reputation he is well known to me, for I have heard a hundred different stories about him. He is said to be a perfect wonder when it comes to disguises and I have often heard it stated he could so alter his appearance that his most intimate acquaintance would not be able to recognize him. He is a king of rascals and I don't know a man in the country who is his equal in the dark and desperate business which he pursues."

"You want to lead an honest life and you need a friend," Clinton said. "What do you say to joining lines with me? I am going into the detective business. I am an actor by profession, and therefore able to assume a disguise with the best of them. I got a good view of the face of the man who struck the murderous blow

to-night and I think I would know him again no matter what disguise he assumed."

"I would be glad of the chance!" the other exclaimed. "And from my knowledge of the criminal classes, I think I can render you valuable assistance."

The young actor was on the right road and had secured a valuable ally.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAD FROM LANCASHIRE.

IN New York there are thousands of places devoted to the sale of strong liquors, and they are divided into many different classes, from the tip-top saloon which displays a collection of paintings and statuary, worth thousands of dollars, to the obscure corner groggery where a five-cent glass of liquor can be had by the thirsty soul.

Saloons, patronized almost exclusively by gentlemen, and where a poorly-dressed man would be apt to feel decidedly out of place, others who depend upon actors, artists, newspaper men and the varied classes which go to make up the world of Bohemia.

Longshoremen, sailors and men who have business about the docks, support a great many drinking-places where they feel at home.

Frenchmen, Germans, Italians and other nationalities have their favorite resorts, and there are also "houses of call" to use the English term for men of various trades.

And New York, lusty young giant of the western world, is so cosmopolitan that it even has drinking saloons which depend for their existence on the patronage of the "dangerous classes," as a police expert would term them, and these in turn are divided into different grades.

The first class rascal does not care to take his liquid refreshment in the same place which is frequented by the minor rogue, who never has the nerve, or skill, to undertake a first-class job; and so there are saloons where the "high tobies" of the profession can be found, as well as dens frequented only by common, vulgar ruffians.

These saloons are well known to the police, but as long as they are decently conducted, it is impossible for them to interfere, and then too as the prominent detectives are wont to say:

"It is very handy sometimes to have a place where we will be apt to find men who are wanted."

To the average man—the stranger—who happens to drop into one of these "queer" saloons there is nothing about the place to suggest to him that there is anything out of the way.

If there are cracksmen present they seldom interfere with the guest in anyway, that is, if the saloon be a thief's house of call of the higher grade.

In any of the common resorts though, where the ruffians of low degree do congregate, if a stranger was foolish enough to exhibit any money he would be assailed and robbed in a hurry, and if he was not also brutally beaten he might think himself lucky.

On Elm street, at the time of which we write, right in the shadows of the City Prison—that gloomy pile, known far and wide as the toms—was a saloon, which according to police belief, was patronized by more first class rascals than any other three drinking places in the city.

It was modeled on the style of what is known as an English chop-house, and a good substantial meal could be had there as well as liquid refreshments.

The proprietor was a muscular-built, middle-aged man, who looked like an Englishman and answered to the name of Stephen Brailton.

Although Brailton had never been caught in any rascality, yet the detectives felt morally certain he had been the instigator of some of the big jobs which, by their magnitude, had startled the metropolis.

It was strongly suspected too that he not only assisted the rogues, who made his place their head-quarters, with his counsel but he also helped them in disposing of their plunder.

In fact, the police officials believed he was one of the greatest fences to be found in the city.

A "fence" in the thieves' argot is the party who buys stolen goods.

The shades of night were beginning to gather thick and heavy over the metropolis.

Brailton had just lit the gas in his hostelry and had taken a seat to look at the evening paper; there being no customers in the saloon.

In fact the "London Arms," as the drinking-saloon was called, didn't do much of any business in the daytime.

It was only after nightfall that its trade began, for the dangerous class of a great city are

a great deal like beasts of prey, they sleep by day, that they may be able to prowl at night.

The entrance into the saloon of a stranger caused the host to rise and take his accustomed place behind the bar.

The new-comer was a rather odd-looking fellow, and any one who was at all posted in regard to nationalities, would have immediately set him down for an Englishman.

He was dressed rather shabbily in a tweed suit, much the worse for wear, with a peculiar, small, round fur cap, pulled down low on his forehead, and, with his rudely-cropped yellow hair, scanty side-whiskers of the same hue, and rough, ruddy face, presented an odd appearance.

"This his the London Harms, I take it," he said, as he sidled up to the bar with an expansive grin upon his face.

The liberty which he took with the letter h, plainly betrayed he was from the English capital.

"That is what the sign outside says," replied the landlord, surveying the stranger closely.

"Well, I'm from London myself, and I was told across the water that this 'ere booming-ken was the one I wanted to strike arter I landed in this 'ere blooming country."

"Ain't been here long, then?" the landlord queried.

"No, I came off the bleeding steamer this hafternoon, and I came right up 'ere the first thing, 'cos I was told that 'ere I would meet with some coves w'ot would take me in 'and and put me hup to the time of day."

"Well, a good many chaps come here who know what is what," Brailton observed.

"Have a glass of something?"

"Don't care if I do; but I ain't come 'ere for to sponge on yer, you know, 'cos I ain't down to skilly yet," and in order to back up the assertion, the fellow drew a handful of silver from his pocket.

"It's all yer blooming Hamerican money," he continued.

"The purser, 'board ship, gave me change for a five-p'um' flimsy afore I came ashore."

By this ambiguous giving out he meant that he had changed a five-pound note before landing.

"Oh, that is all right; I could see by your face that you were the right kind of cove, and that there wasn't anything of the bilk about you."

"No, no, I'm a regular high-flyer, although I am a little haff my feed now."

"Give it a name," said the landlord, waving his hand toward the well-stocked shelves where the liquors were displayed.

"A little blue ruin," replied the Londoner.

This is the English slang term for gin, and although Brailton had been twenty years away from home, yet he had not forgotten the argot of the London slums.

The stranger took a good-sized drink, and gulped it down at a swallow without winking.

"Precious good stuff, that is, gov'nor!" he exclaimed. "Mighty good booze and no mistake. It puts 'eart into a man," and, as he spoke, he smacked his lips and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"What line are you in?" Brailton asked.

"I'm a tinker by trade, but, bless yer, I ain't done nothink in that 'ere line for years. Yer see, as soon as I got my growth some of the coves found as how I was 'andy with my props, me fists, yer know, and I've stripped for many a scrap for a fiver a side."

"Me name is Downey Welsh, and I'm a pretty good man at about a hundred and thirty p'un's, and I never was wery particular if me man was ten p'un's 'eavier nor me."

Brailton nodded; the name was familiar to him as that of a pugilist who had figured in a few minor matches in England, one of the small fry who didn't amount to much.

But the fact that there was such a man, and he had heard of him, was no guarantee that the person before him was the person he had represented himself to be.

It was a common thing, as the host well knew, for tenth-rate fellows, sometimes men who were only hangers-on of the sporting saloons, to come to America and pass themselves off as being well-known boxers, under the impression that the Yankees would never detect the cheat.

This fellow, though, had a certain look about him which seemed to the experienced eye of the landlord to indicate that he was a "fighter," and as he didn't pretend to be any man of much reputation, Brailton was inclined to the belief that his story was all right.

In his young days the host had been a boxer of renown, and, even now, he could hold his own

with the best of them, and having so much experience it was no easy matter for any pretender to deceive him.

"I'm honly in the rough as a fighter, hin course," the stranger remarked, modestly.

"But I never lost no pot of money for my backers, and I never cost 'em one either, for I can allers fight as good a battle straight from my beer as if I 'ad six months' training."

"Well, you don't look like a lusher."

"Oh, I like the drink well enough, but I never let it make a fool of me."

"Tinkering ain't much of a trade and fighting ain't much better," the landlord observed, with a peculiar side-glance at the other's face.

"Seems to me that a likely young chap like you ought to be able to do something better."

"Oh, I've got another trade."

"Yes?"

"Oh, yes, I find things w'ot's lost," and dropping his voice a little, he leaned over the counter and continued. "Yes, I find things w'ot's lost, and sometimes I find things w'ot ain't lost, and that minds me. Do you know a cove named Macard?"

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPECTED.

BRAILTON was not the kind of man to be taken by surprise, being too old a hand for that, and although the question was entirely unexpected, yet it did not disturb him in the least.

"Macard, Macard?" he said, reflectively, as if he was trying to recall whether he knew such a man or not.

"Yes, that's the cove I am after, Talmon Macard, and the chap what put me on the lay said as how he was in this 'ere town."

"Well, the name seems familiar to me, and I have an idea a man by that name comes in here, once in a while. You see, in a place like this, it ain't possible for a man to know all his customers. Who is this Macard, anyway?"

"Blamed if I know! h'only they said across the water that he was the biggest high toby to be found in this blooming country, and an Hamerican cove, w'ot I run across, said as 'ow if I could get in with him, I would be put onto a good lay, right haff, and it was this 'ere Hamerican w'ot directed me for to come to your 'ouse, 'cos he said it was 'ead-quarters for professional gents."

"Well, all sorts of people come here," Brailton remarked, evasively, for the landlord was an old bird and one not easily trapped.

The stranger seemed to be all right, but then he might be a spy in disguise, come for the express purpose of getting Brailton into a "hole," to use the cant term, and this was exactly what the landlord did not intend should be done.

"What was the name of this American?"

"Meldrum—'Ank Meldrum," the other replied. "And he was an out and outer for shoving the queer. Dang my buttons! I never see'd a man who could poke off the flimsies the way that feller could."

The landlord, being well-posted in regard to all the rogues of note immediately recognized the name of the expert counterfeiter, although he was not personally acquainted with him.

"Meldrum, Meldrum," he said, reflectively, "it seems to me that I have heard of such a man."

"Oh, he's a 'igh flyer and no mistake! He gave me a letter to this 'ere Macard, but he said as 'ow he wasn't werry well acquainted with 'im, 'cos he only met 'im once, but he knew he was just the kind of man to 'elp a cove like myself along."

"Do you mind showing me the letter?" the landlord asked.

"Not at all! why should I? Ain't you the man w'ot is going for to give me the office so I can make a blooming living in this bleeding country?" the Englishman replied.

"Oh, I will do what I can for you, of course," Brailton asserted.

The other drew forth an old-fashioned wallet and extracted from it a letter, considerably the worse for wear.

"I have lugged it around quite a time and it don't look as nice as it might," the Englishman exclaimed as he handed the letter to the host.

Brailton opened it.

The letter was brief and directly to the point. It read as follows.

"FRIEND MACARD:—

"I take the liberty of recommending the bearer of this, Downey Welsh, to your good offices. He is true blue and can be trusted. Put him in the way of getting on some good job, and you will not regret it.

Your friend

HANK MELDRUM.

"P. S. As a token that this is from me, let me re-

call to your remembrance the useful article I made for you at the railroad junction in Ohio, when we were both on the same lay."

Brailton had the reputation of being one of the shrewdest men of cloudy repute in New York; a fellow, who, like an old rat, seemed to have the power of smelling out a trap no matter how cunningly it was set.

Like the hunted animal, he was always on the watch, and never allowed his vigilance to sleep.

And so on this occasion he examined the letter with the utmost care.

It appeared to be a genuine thing, though, and the landlord was not able to discover anything in it at all suspicious.

The reference to the article made by Meldrum for Macard, a secret plainly between the two men, seemed to assure that the note was really written by the man whose name was signed to it.

Brailton folded up the letter and returned it to the young Englishman, and the expression upon his face showed that he was giving the subject serious consideration.

"I think, as I said before, that there is a man named Macard who comes in here sometimes, but whether he can do anything for you or not, is more than I know."

"You might speak to 'im and tell the blooming bloke 'ow I am sitcoated," the other suggested.

"Yes, that is a good idea, and when he comes in I will do so. Take a seat and make yourself comfortable."

"Much obliged, and if you are able to put me in the way of doing a good stroke of work—I ain't a bit particular as to w'ot it is yer know—why I'm the man w'ot won't object to sand a trifle."

"Oh, that is all right," the landlord answered, carelessly. "I am always willing to oblige a customer when I can."

His barkeeper making his appearance at this moment, the landlord resigned his place behind the bar to him, and disappeared through a little door at the further end of the bar.

Downey Welsh took a seat and picked up a newspaper.

The door through which Brailton went, led into a small room right at the back of the saloon, which communicated with the main entry through another door directly opposite to the one which led into the bar.

There was still another door to this room, although it was a small one, and this led into the yard at the back of the house, and from the yard one could easily get into the street by means of a small passage which ran by the side of the house, or by scaling the side fence on the left hand, access to the yard of the house on the side street which ran from Elm to Broadway could be gained, and from this yard one could go by the side passage out into the by street.

So that if a "gentleman" was cornered in the saloon by any anxious inquirers whom he did not care to see—members of the detective police for instance—all he had to do was to make his escape by means of the rear yard and the side passage on the other street, or by scaling a dozen or so of fences he could reach the upper by-street.

So that, to capture a man in the London Arms was a difficult job, and required the use of a small army, unless the trick was done so adroitly that no warning was given the bird.

The small room was fitted up with tables and chairs and in the side wall, next to the saloon, was a sliding panel, so that any one in the apartment by means of it could both see and hear all that went on in the other apartment.

A single man was in the apartment when Brailton entered and by means of the secret panel he was examining the young Englishman with scrupulous carefulness.

This person was a man about the medium hight, well-built, although the old, happy suit which he wore and the loose overcoat somewhat disguised his figure.

He looked like a workingman, his hands were stained with toil, and with his short, black beard which gave an Irish cast to his features, an acute observer would have been apt to set him down for a carpenter or a bricklayer or something of that sort.

There wasn't any light in the room, but in the semi-darkness the figure of the occupant of the apartment could be distinguished. When Brailton entered, the man closed the panel and took a chair at the nearest table.

The landlord sat down on the opposite side of the table.

"Did you catch on to that chap?" he asked, sinking his voice into a half-whisper.

"Oh, yes," the other replied, in the same cautious tone, "I spotted him."

The voice of the man was a peculiar one; no carpenter, bricklayer or kindred workman who toiled with his hands and depended upon physical strength for the main part of his work ever spoke in any such tones.

For it was a trained voice—such as would be possessed by the public orator used to addressing large assemblages, a cultivated singer or an actor who had made a study of counterfeiting the voices of all kinds of people.

It was flexible and penetrating, every word distinctly uttered, a pleasant voice and one which a good judge would have decided the owner had under perfect control.

"What do you think of the fellow?"

"He wants to see Macard," observed the other, in a musing sort of way, instead of answering the question.

"Yes, that is his little game."

"Some men of his kidney have wished to see Talmon Mocard before, but, like the fellow who went to hunt the tiger, when it came to interviewing the animal, there was not so much sport in the matter as they anticipated."

"What is the matter?" Brailton inquired, taking alarm upon the instant.

"Do you think it is a plant?"

"Exactly, that is my idea."

"Hang me if I suspected it!"

"It is only a suspicion, you know, and I may be wrong, but I can generally tell a police spy as far as I can see, and I mistrust this fellow, although I haven't anything but a presentiment of danger to go upon."

"Run him in here to me. Tell him that I am a king-pin of cracksmen, and can do as much for him as Macard. My name is Jones, you know, Black Tom Jones, and as far as cross coves are concerned, I am at the top of the heap."

"All right—go for him!"

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSAL.

"Go for him!" and Black Tom Jones, as he had called himself, laid back in his chair and indulged in a sardonic laugh.

"Well, now, you can bet all the wealth you have got or ever expect to have, that I will go for him and in a way he will despise, too."

"Something in my bones tells me that the fellow is a police spy, and his mission here is to entrap some good man—Macard, I suppose, since he has inquired for him, and now my idea is to put up a job on this spy and have some fun at his expense, and the police department who set the rascal on the track."

"There isn't anything in the world that I enjoy more than a good joke, and I have a scheme in my head that will be apt to make these police officials, who planned this thing, swear when I work it."

"But I say, what has Macard been up to lately that the detectives should trouble their heads about him?" the landlord asked, with a curious glance in the face of the other.

"Nothing at all that I've heard of; maybe it is on the same old matter."

"Very likely, for there's no big job been worked lately anywhere around here; that is I haven't heard of any, and I should be apt to, I think, if any important crib had been cracked."

"Oh, there hasn't been any big trick taken in this locality for three months," the cracksmen observed.

"If Macard is wanted, as it appears, it is on account of some old matter, and not a particularly important one, either."

"But if this fellow is a spy how comes it that he has this letter from Meldrum?" the landlord asked.

"Oh, Meldrum got into some tight place, and in order to curry favor with the beaks lent himself to the scheme," the other replied.

"I haven't seen Meldrum for years, but I have heard about him once in a while, and am pretty well posted in regard to what he has been doing. He was in England about three years ago, 'showing the queer,' but the Johnny Bulls got down on his little game very quickly, and he was forced to skip out of the country."

"He came back here and was nabbed in about a week after he landed, convicted and jailed."

"When he came out his health was all broken down and he tried the honest dodge, and I don't know what has become of him. But from this development though, I rather fancy that, having a hard road to travel, he has endeavored to

ease up a little on it by trying to give the detectives points about his old pals."

"If that is so the scoundrel ought to be knifed!" Brailton cried in honest indignation.

"It is only a supposition on my part, of course, but it may be the truth. I will make this hound of a Meldrum pay dearly if he dares to set the dogs of the law snapping at my heels!"

"I never knew you to be tardy about paying debts of this kind," the landlord remarked.

"I never heard any one complain in regard to it," the other observed with another one of his chilling smiles; a smile which had much more of menace than of merriment in it.

"I'll bring him in and if he is a spy, put up some job that will make him sick of that kind of a trade."

"Oh, leave me alone for that."

The landlord departed, and seeking the young Englishman in the bar-room explained matters to him.

"There's a cove in the private room who would be a good man for you to know," Brailton said.

"I would be 'appy to make his acquaintance," Downey Welsh remarked.

"He's a man well up in the business and if he takes it into his head to make a pal of you I don't know of a better cove to help you along."

"That is the kind of man I am a-looking for," the other replied.

"Come along then and I will introduce you."

Welsh rose to his feet and Brailton conducted him into the private room.

By this time the occupant had lit the gas, but had turned it down so that the apartment was only dimly illuminated.

"This is the young man," said Brailton, introducing the Englishman. "He's from across the water but he brings a good recommend from Hank Meldrum addressed to Macard—you know Macard, don't you?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I really know him I know of him, and I think I met him once somewhere, but I ain't sure on the point," the other replied.

"But I say, Brailton, he isn't in town now; is he? I haven't heard anything of him for a long time."

"Well, I really disremember," the landlord replied.

"Fact is I don't believe I would know the gent if I saw him unless he told me who he was."

"Bring us some beer, for talking is dry work!" exclaimed Jones.

Brailton brought the beer and then discreetly withdrew.

"The landlord tells me that you are anxious for a job."

"Oh, yes, anythink at all where there is a chance to collar some mopuses," responded the Englishman with a knowing grin.

"And you are not particular in regard to the nature of the job?"

"Not a bit! W'ot's the hods as long as ye'r 'appy."

"Well, I won't beat around the bush with you," Mr. Jones remarked, lowering his voice a little.

"This here job is a little off color, and if things didn't work right we might get into trouble."

"You can't pick up money, you know, without working for it," Welsh replied with the air of a philosopher.

"And I know that if you go in for a tidy bit of swag, why it is honly natural there should be some risk with it. Don't be afeard on account of that. You'll find I am true blue all the way through, and I am not the man to be afeard of being hauled afore the beaks. Oh, I've done time and I know w'ot it is to be atween the walls of a stone jug, and I hain't hany the worse for it either."

"There's a crib up town that's worth the cracking."

"I'm your man!" the Englishman immediately declared.

"The job will be an easy one and the swag will be rich. A pal of mine has been piping the place off for a week, and we have got every thing down fine."

"That is jest elegant—as fine as silk," and Downey Welsh smacked his lips in anticipation.

"Well, I always calculate to do my jobs up in a workmanlike manner; I'm no botch, and the pals who stand in with me never have any cause to complain. I have made some big strikes in my time, but in such matters I always make it a point to keep in the background, for I am no fool to give myself away. My name, by the way, is Jones, Thomas Jones, and among my pals I am called Black Tom. It ain't a particularly handsome name, but as it fits me well I

don't kick at it; I reckon it wouldn't do me much good if I did." And as he spoke he stroked his crispy, black beard with his hand.

"Tain't an ugly name, by no means," the young Englishman remarked. "And when a happellation of that kind gets to a fellow it is apt to stick like a brier. Now, my name is Timothy, you know, Timothy Welsh, but as I was growing hup, people began for to say I was a downey cove, 'cos I wasn't one of the kind of lads as could be made to believe that the moon was made out of green cheese, or no such nonsense of that kind."

"Well, sir, would you believe it? that 'ere name stuck to me—'cos it fitted me so well, I s'pose—until nobody called me nothing but Downey Welsh, and that 'ere is the name I halways give when hany one axes me for my baptismal happellation."

"It is a very good name—you couldn't have a better," the other remarked, approvingly.

"But, I say, gov'nor, when is this 'ere job to be worked?"

"In two or three days; just as soon as the plum is ripe. You know it won't do to hurry such matters forward; the more haste the less speed sometimes. I am to meet my pal to-night, and from his report I will probably be able to tell when the job can be done."

"The idea is to watch the time, you know, and take the house when it is unguarded so as to give us a clean field."

The Englishman nodded his head in approval of this idea.

"Drink up your beer and we will toddle up-town and see how the land lies. My pal is right inside of the house, you know. He got a situation there a month ago as one of the man-servants so as to be able to lay the crib open. It ain't hard, you see, to work a job of this kind when you have got a pal inside to help you crack the crib."

"Oh, no, that is the blooming kind of a lark I like."

The two then quitted the saloon.

"We'll take a horse-car, for it will save us time," Jones observed, as they descended the steps into the street.

They proceeded to Center street, took a car and rode to Houston street, where they alighted.

In Houston street, midway between the Bowery and Broadway, Jones halted in front of a disreputable-looking saloon.

"Wait a moment," he said. "My pal was to leave word here for me."

He then ran into the saloon.

Downey Welsh improved the opportunity to glance up and down the street.

Upon the opposite sidewalk was a common-looking man, plainly dressed, a workingman, or a small-salaried clerk, such a fellow as can be encountered by the dozen at almost every turn in the streets of a big city.

There wasn't anything about him to attract attention, being so like the ordinary run of humanity.

The man was lounging along, looking into the shop windows, and not, apparently, paying any particular attention to what was going on around him.

But when Jones ran into the saloon, the man came to a halt and suddenly became much interested in the illustrated journals displayed in a window of a newspaper store.

A critical observer, intently engaged upon watching both Downey Welsh and this indolent stranger, might have fancied that a look of intelligence passed between the two at the moment when Jones disappeared in the saloon and the Englishman glanced around him, but if it was so, it would have required the eyes of a hawk to detect it and as after the first exchange of glances neither one took the least notice of the other, even the most careful observer would have been apt to fancy that his eyes had deceived him.

Jones hardly remained in the saloon for a minute, then came out with an open letter in his hand.

"My pal won't be on hand until about midnight. What do you say to putting in the time at some theater?"

Downey was agreeable, and to Niblo's Garden they went.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRACKING A CRIB.

THE world-famous pantomime troupe, the Ravels, were then appearing at Niblo's Garden, attracting large audiences, and as there was a crowd around the ticket-office the pair were compelled to wait for a few minutes before they could procure cards of admission.

At last they got their tickets and entered the theater.

Close behind them came the shabby-looking man who had been lounging so leisurely along Houston street.

The Englishman happening to glance around him, quite natural under the circumstances, caught sight of the fellow.

The gaze was returned but no signs of recognition passed between the two.

Jones also looked about him as he waited for his turn at the box-office and noticing the seedy fellow called the attention of his companion to him.

"That chap looks as if he hadn't any cash to spare for a show," he remarked.

"You can't halways tell by a cove's looks you know," Welsh replied.

Although it was clearly an impossibility for the man to over hear the conversation, yet he seemed to understand that the pair were conversing about him and it seemed to make him nervous, for the moment the two took their eyes off of him he changed his position, and took a stand from which he could see them, but it was not easy for them to catch sight of him.

He followed the two into the auditorium when they entered, and, refraining from taking a seat, posted himself in the lobby.

Half-hid by a pillar, he could keep his eyes upon the two without being likely to attract their attention.

Between the acts Jones invited his companion out to have some liquor refreshment at the saloon adjoining the theater and every time the fellow kept close watch upon them, being careful however to keep so far in the rear that he was not likely to be observed.

At the close of the performance Jones and the Englishman made their way into the street, the shabby man still keeping directly in the rear.

"Now we have about an hour to kill time so we'll take a look in at a friend of mine on Bleeker street," Jones remarked.

Bleeker street, then as now, was full of gilded dens of vice and into one of them, about the most extensive gambling house in New York, the boss crackman conducted the stranger.

Before admission could be gained into the place the visitors had to encounter the scrutiny of a vigilant negro who was posted at a sentry behind a door with a hole in it through which he could survey all applicants.

Jones was well known to the janitor and was admitted without question.

The shabby man did not attempt to gain admittance but took up a position on the opposite side of the street, so as to be able to see the pair when they came out.

But the able crackman knew a trick worth two of this.

Whether he had a suspicion that a watch had been set upon him or not, he took such precautions as to render such a scheme a fruitless waste of time.

The gambling-house was so arranged that in the rear it communicated with a saloon on the corner of the next street.

After taking a flyer, as Jones termed it, at the faro table for about an hour, and getting rid of a few dollars, the crackman said it was time they were off, but that he wanted to say a few words to a friend of his who kept the saloon on the corner; then by means of the rear passage he conducted Welsh into the saloon.

There he had a whispered interview with the saloon-keeper, then he invited the Englishman to have a glass of ale, and while they were being served the proprietor went out.

In about five minutes he returned, just as the pair finished their ale, and nodded to Jones.

"Come along," said the crackman, and he led the way to the rear door of the saloon which was on the side street.

By the curbstone stood a hack, one of the kind known as Night-hawks, and which do not bear the best of reputations.

"Get in, for we haven't any time to spare," Jones remarked.

Welsh understood the movement now, and saw that his companion was a first class professional.

His whispered conference with the saloon-keeper was in regard to the coach.

He took the hack because he was afraid of being shadowed, but by this adroit device he rendered such a thing impossible.

Away went the hack with the pair inside.

"My pal has sent me word that the place is ripe and ready to be picked," he explained to his companion as the coach rolled on.

"So we will get to work on the crib without delay."

"Halways make 'ay when the sun shines," the Englishman observed.

But though he spoke with a humorous air and a grin overspread his countenance as the words were uttered, yet there was a look in his eyes which seemed to indicate he was not pleased with the way in which things were going.

For a good hour the coach went on its way, getting well out into the suburbs of the city, as the Englishman could plainly distinguish, there being a full moon which rendered all objects almost as visible as by day.

The hack came to a stop.

"Get out; five minutes' walk fetches us to the crib," the crackman remarked.

The two descended to the ground.

The neighborhood was quite countrified, the street being lined with trees on both sides.

Ten minutes' walk, and they came to a handsome mansion, surrounded by well-kept grounds.

"This is the crib. As you see, there isn't a light burning. All the family are away and the servants, taking advantage of the absence of their master and mistress have all cleared out for a night's jollification, leaving only an old man and woman to mind the house.

"There's a couple of thousand dollars' worth of plate—the solid article, you know, no plated stuff—a lot of jewelry and considerable cash in the shape of United States bonds, and we can lift it all as easy as rolling off a log."

"Isn't that a jolly lay-out!" exclaimed the other.

"You can bet your ducats on that!"

"Now then, the programme is for you to wait here on the watch while I crack the crib. My pal is inside and will let me in the moment I give the signal."

"Well now, if you ain't worked the trick to the queen's taste, then I'm a duffer!" Welsh exclaimed in evident admiration.

"No duffer about you; you're too good a man for that!" the crackman rejoined.

"Keep your peepers peeled though, and don't fail to give me warning by a shrill whistle if a cop comes in sight," he continued.

"All right," answered the other.

Away then Jones stole with noiseless steps.

The two had entered the grounds by the carriage gate.

A winding driveway led to the house, and as it was fringed with slender trees and bushes, it was an easy matter for any one to approach the house unobserved by taking advantage of the shadows cast by these ornaments.

The Englishman watched the shadow of his companion until it disappeared in the gloom.

Sorely troubled in his mind was the man who remained beneath the shadow of the trees.

As the reader has doubtless suspected long ere this the cockney Englishman who called himself Downey Welsh was no other than the young actor Nat Clinton in disguise.

As we have seen he had played his part to perfection, completely deceiving the old and experienced rascal who kept the London Arms.

So far New York Nat—as his chums were wont to call the young man on account of his love for his native city, and his disposition to praise great Gotham on every opportunity—had succeeded beyond his hopes.

He had been accepted for a pal by a master-soundrel and was now assisting him in a house-breaking operation.

And too, despite the fact that both the landlord and crackman had pretended that they were not intimately acquainted with any Talmon Macard, he believed that his companion was that individual in person.

He felt sure he was on the right track and in time would bag his game.

But Nat was in a dilemma just now as to what he had best do, and while he was deliberating the deep-mouthed bay of a dog fell on his ears.

CHAPTER IX.

A PERILOUS POSITION.

FOLLOWING the first growl was a chorus of them.

It was evident that there were watch-dogs on the place, and from the way in which they gave tongue, Clinton judged they were good-sized animals.

"He has disturbed the dogs, and if they are loose they will be apt to damage him," was our hero's reflection.

"But of course he knows they are tied up; he is too cunning a crackman not to have posted himself in regard to so important a matter, and taken measures to have silenced the dogs, if they were in a condition to interfere with the success of his plans."

As the animals, after the first outbreak, lapsed into silence, Clinton felt satisfied his assumption was correct.

In a moment though he had reason to change his mind.

Again the howls sounded on the air, and he could distinctly hear the dogs bounding toward the spot where he was posted as fast as their legs could carry them.

The moment he discovered this fact, our hero made up his mind that the quicker he retreated the better.

He was well armed, and felt satisfied he could vanquish the dogs, if he was forced into an encounter with the brutes; but then there was the danger that the noise of the fight would rouse the neighborhood, attract the attention of the officers, and then he knew he would have a difficult task to explain what he was doing in that quarter.

If he revealed that he was in disguise, and explained the object of his mission, the chances were about a hundred to one that his story would not be credited, and that he would be taken to the station-house as a suspicious character.

And to be arrested by the cops right at the beginning of his career, the young actor felt would be fatal to the success of his schemes.

At all hazards such a thing must be avoided.

Quick as a flash these thoughts passed through the mind of our hero, just as soon as he made the discovery that the dogs were loose.

He must escape immediately.

Taking to his heels he ran to the gate, but just as he got outside the dogs came up.

They were mastiffs, big, ugly-looking brutes, seemingly strong enough to pull down an ox.

The low fence which surrounded the grounds was not sufficient to check their pursuit, for they cleared it at a bound.

The young actor saw he was fated to have a fight with the brutes, it being impossible for him to escape from them, although he had started on a run at the top of his speed; but after the brutes had cleared the fence, there wasn't any question but what they would overtake him as they came on open-mouthed.

The young actor had come to that part of the grounds near the corner of the street where the open iron fence stopped and a brick wall began.

Placing his back against the wall, Clinton drew his revolver and prepared for action.

On came the dog, great tawny-colored brutes, fierce in rage.

As it chanced, one was a little in the advance of the other.

This gave the assailed man the opportunity for which he had prayed.

His revolver was a self-cocking weapon, needing only a single pull to raise the hammer and discharge the ball.

When the foremost dog was within fifty feet, the actor fired at him.

Clinton was an excellent shot, and the howl which came from the animal, testified that on this occasion he had not missed his aim.

The wound was not a dangerous one, though, the bullet happening to strike a bone and glance off, inflicting only a slight hurt.

Clinton fired again immediately, but it took three shots to disable the dog.

The second animal was not in the least dismayed by the fate of his companion, but, if possible, advanced with greater fury.

Our hero had only three shots left, and fearing that he might not be lucky enough to check the brute's mad rush with these, got out his bowie-knife.

As he had apprehended, neither one of the three bullets inflicted a wound sufficient to disable the dog, and when the animal came near enough he leaped full at the throat of the young actor.

Clinton was prepared for the movement.

Grasping the revolver by the barrel, he thrust the butt into the mouth of the dog, while at the same moment with his left hand, which clutched the bowie-knife, he drove the steel into the brute's breast up to the hilt.

The stroke was a deadly one, and with a gasp, the giant beast sunk to the ground, writhing in the agonies of death.

The young actor drew a long breath of relief. The perspiration stood on his forehead in large drops.

"Upon my word, this is the toughest fight I ever had!" he exclaimed.

"These ugly brutes would certainly have torn me all to pieces! I have had a narrow escape!"

He returned the knife to its place, took out his handkerchief, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

The noise of the conflict had aroused the

neighborhood, and lights were beginning to appear in all directions.

"The quicker I get out of this, the better," Clinton observed, as he noticed the evidences of life now so rapidly multiplying.

"For if I should happen to be overhauled in regard to my share in this night's work, an explanation would be extremely awkward."

"I'll cut my lucky and leave Jones to look out for himself. If he isn't warned by this time that mischief is afoot, then he must be extremely dull of comprehension."

And with this remark Clinton started.

Five steps took him to the corner, and as he turned it he ran into the arms of a burly policeman, who had sneaked up to the scene with catlike tread with the idea of having a surprise party with the authors of the disturbance.

The man, who was a red-bearded Irishman, bull-headed and brawny-limbed, grabbed Clinton by the coat immediately, and flourished his long "night-stick" before his eyes in an extremely menacing manner.

"Aha, ye murdering thafe of the wourld, is it there ye are?" he cried, a triumphant grin overspreading his broad red face.

"Hold on! what are you about? Take care! you'll tear my coat!" the young actor expostulated, completely disgusted at this unexpected encounter, and in his heart he wished the "cop" was at the bottom of the river.

"I've got ye, ye blaggard!" cried the officer, taking a firmer grip on the coat and making a movement as though he intended to strike his prisoner a heavy whack over the head with the club.

Our hero had no mind to allow his good-looking countenance to be disfigured by any clubbing process, and perceiving right at the beginning that he had to deal with one of the stupid foreign brutes whose brutal acts bring disgrace upon the New York police force, he concluded there was not the least use to waste time by talking to him.

And so, when the officer—confident that by reason of his superior strength he would have no difficulty in taking his prisoner to the police-station—commenced to urge him onward, the young actor pretended to be willing to go quietly, saying:

"All right, Mister Officer; don't use your club, for I am your mutton. It is all a mistake, as I will explain at the police-station."

"Oh, ye're a foine burd, and ye'll explain a hape, I've no doubt; but divil a bit of green do ye persave in my eye, Mister Michael Finnegan, do ye mind?"

But if the prisoner could not see any green in his eye, he was destined to astonish "Mister Michael Finnegan" as he had never been astonished before, although he had had some ridiculous adventures since ward politics and a powerful "gall" had got him on the police force.

For about ten steps Clinton walked on as quietly as a lamb, explaining to the officer that it was all right—a mistake, etc.; and then, suddenly throwing his arms around him, the trained athlete gave him a sudden twist and brought him to the ground, at the same time wresting the long night-stick from his hand.

Our hero knew he could easily upset the Irishman and free himself if he could succeed in taking the other off his guard, but in order to escape he must do more than this, for the officers by giving immediate chase would be apt to raise a hue and cry that would lead to his recapture.

So in order to put a stop to this he had possessed himself of the night-stick and when the Irishman attempt to rise after his downfall he fetched him a whack on the head that strongly brought back to the mind of the Celt remembrances of his youthful days when he went regularly once a year to Donnybrook fair for the purpose of getting his head smashed.

Having succeeded in laying out the officer Clinton took to his heels and ran like a deer down the street.

The delay though had given time for the neighborhood to be aroused and pursuers followed on his track.

It was an exciting chase.

CHAPTER X.

A FRUITLESS CHASE.

CLINTON was a speedy runner and ran like a deer, but as all the neighborhood had been roused by the noise which had been made, new pursuers kept joining in the chase every minute or two.

As it happened the street down which the young actor ran led straight to the river, crossing the Hudson River Railroad which runs paral-

lel with the stream and only a few yards from it by a bridge.

At the foot of the street was a dock.

This Clinton could see as he entered upon the bridge.

His idea had been, after discovering in what direction he was proceeding, to descend to the railroad track and seek a hiding-place either up or down the iron way.

But when he got on the bridge he saw lights up and down the track which signified that there were people in both directions, for the lights came evidently from lanterns carried by men advancing toward the bridge.

Under the circumstances then there was no other course open but to keep on.

By the swiftness of his running he had managed to gain ground and as there was a slight bend in the road just before it reached the bridge, none of the pursuers were in sight, but their cries came plainly to the young actor's ears showing that they were still hot in pursuit.

In such moments of difficulty as this the able, inventive mind acts quickly.

The hunted man saw but one road of escape open to him and he was prompt to take advantage of it.

Down toward the river he ran at his best speed.

There was need for haste for the men on the track had been attracted by the hue and cry ringing out so shrilly on the night air and were hastening toward the bridge as fast as possible.

The light of the lanterns, bobbing up and down as their owners ran onward, plainly showed this.

The pier at the foot of the street was a poorly constructed one, being merely made out of spiles with a planking on top.

When New York Nat reached the pier he did not hesitate for a moment for he had decided what to do before gaining the structure.

He hurried to the side, and swung himself over and then allowed himself to drop, noiselessly, into the water.

From the lay of the land, and the length of the pier, he had calculated that at the spot where he entered the stream the water would not reach above his head and that by wading under the pier and getting to a spot where the water was just deep enough to cover all but his head he would be enabled to defy discovery.

This plan he put into operation and when his pursuers with loud shouts came trooping upon the pier—there were twenty of them at least, so wide-spread had been the alarm—Clinton finding that the water shoaled so rapidly that he was not able to find a spot where he could stand on bottom and be safe from scrutiny, swam from spile to spile until he reached a spot just about in the center of the bridge.

Here two spiles had been driven down side by side, about eighteen inches apart.

And attached to one of the spiles was a small bit of plank projecting into the water, a section of a cross-tie which had once served to hold the wharf together.

The young actor ensconced himself between the two spiles, the broken tie affording him a support so he could keep his head above the water.

In this position he was secure from observation from either side of the pier, the spile completely shielding him from sight.

Unless the pursuers procured a boat and came under the pier there wasn't the least danger of his being discovered.

And even if they had a boat, owing to the cross-pieces along the sides which bound the wharf together, they would not be able to penetrate under the pier.

Clinton's position was not a comfortable one for as there was a high wind, and the surface of the river was "lumpy," and being compelled to keep as much of his body under water as possible, consequently, every minute or so the waves broke completely over his head.

The young actor had disguised himself in the most artistic manner, as was only natural for long practice in his profession had made him an adept at this sort of thing, but his disguise had never been calculated to resist such an assault as this.

The water washed off the coloring which had given his face a ruddy hue; the glue which fastened the little English, jockey-like side-whiskers dissolved, and away they went, a prey to the demons of the tide.

One wavelet, seemingly more venturesome than its fellow, washed off the peculiar cap and the light-colored wigs which had most materially aided in altering the young actor's appearance, but by a hasty grasp Clinton succeeded in recovering both the articles.

He replaced the cap upon his head but crammed the wig into his pocket, for there was now no need for him to return to his disguise.

And in fact he couldn't if he had so wished for the water had restored him once again to his natural looks.

Great was the astonishment and loud the curses that came from the lips of the "hue and cry" when they reached the pier and made the discovery that the fugitive, whom they had pursued so hotly, was not there.

"Where is he—where is he gone?" came simultaneously from a dozen throats.

"I swear I saw him run down on the pier!" cried a lanky, long-legged fellow who had been the foremost man in the chase.

This was not strictly true for he had not come in sight of the pier at the time when the hunted man took to the water.

But he firmly believed he had seen the fugitive run out to the end of the wharf and a half-dozen who had been the nearest to the leader declared they had seen the fugitive gain the pier.

"Mebbe he jumped over the fence after crossing the bridge and ran up or down the track," suggested one of the crowd.

By this time the railroad men who had been patrolling the track arrived on the scene, and all of them stoutly declared that no one had descended from the bridge to the track, but they were all quite sure that they had seen a dark figure run across the bridge and go down toward the wharf.

This was no stretch of the imagination on the part of the railroad men, for they were old and experienced men with eyes trained from long use to night work, and they had been able to distinguish a dark figure outlined against the sky, crossing the bridge.

"P'haps there's a boat at the end of the pier and he's a-biding in it," suggested one of the bystanders who was gifted with a vivid imagination.

"Or jumped overboard and is clinging to one of the spiles somewhere," urged another.

Then there was a general rush to the end of the pier, but they found not what they expected to see.

"Under the dock, mebbe," said one of the railroad men.

"Get a boat!" cried another.

But there wasn't any boat to be had in the neighborhood, and after searching as well as they were able, without discovering any trace of the fugitive, they reluctantly gave it up as a bad job and departed.

Our hero felt decidedly relieved when the noise of the footsteps died away in the distance, but he waited nearly an hour before he left his hiding-place, for he was afraid that some one might be watching in the neighborhood.

The cold gray light of the early morning was beginning to line the eastern skies when New York Nat waded from under the pier and sought refuge in a little grove a short distance up the river.

A rocky, wooded point jutted out into the stream, and when our hero gained the shelter of the trees he felt secure from observation.

Being chilled to the bone, by reason of his long immersion in the water, which was rather chilly, for the hot weather had not set in with its usual strength, the young actor for a while acted in such a manner that any one observing his antics would surely have taken him for a maniac.

He ran up and down, danced, swung his arms to and fro, clapped his hands and did all in his power to warm himself up.

Then, having got himself into a healthy glow again he stripped off his clothes and wrung the water out as well as possible.

This done, he resumed them and again began to stride up and down.

"Now that my disguise is gone I doubt if any one would be able to identify me as the man who was chased so hotly last night," he remarked.

"And how the deuce did the thing come about, anyway?" he continued, as he reflected upon the mysterious occurrences that had so unexpectedly befallen him.

"How did it happen that the dogs came for me? Why on earth didn't they chew that expert, Mr. Jones, up? I heard them bark as he approached the house, and then the first thing I knew they came, open-mouthed for me."

"Can it be possible that it was a plant?"

And Clinton's brow clouded as he put the question:

"Is this Jones Macard then, as I suspected, and in some mysterious way did he penetrate my disguise and guess that my mission was to entrap him, and so resolve to get me into a snare?"

"Upon my life! it looks like it! He is a genius. By instinct, for there wasn't anything else to guide him, he detected that I was in disguise, and suspected immediately that I was a bloodhound."

"Then he smelt out the spy who had been placed upon his track—for I remember now he spoke in regard to the man as we stood by the box office at Niblo's Garden."

"His visit to the gambling-house, his exit by the rear way and employment of the coach was merely a skillful dodge to throw the spy off the track, and it succeeded, too, to a charm."

"The attack on the house was an ingenious device to introduce me to the dogs and through them to the police."

"The game was well-played, but it did not succeed, and now I must bestir myself and see if I can't give him a Roland for his Oliver."

"I must wait until my clothes are dry, though, before I can venture out of here."

At this point his meditations were rudely interrupted by female cries of distress.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THE cries came from the river, and around the rocky point, about a hundred feet from the shore came a light fishing-boat drifting with the tide, and in it on her knees was a beautiful girl wringing her hands and uttering cries of alarm.

She had evidently come forth on a fishing-excursion, for there was fishing-tackle in the boat and had had the misfortune to lose her oars overboard.

As we have seen, our hero was an excellent swimmer, and without a moment's hesitation, he cast off his hat, coat, and shoes, and plunged into the water.

New York Nat never hesitated when a human life was at stake.

It did not take him long to reach the boat, and when he came up to it, he grasped it by the stern.

"Do not fear; there isn't the least danger," he said to the maiden, as he caught hold of the boat.

The moment she beheld that rescue was at hand, the courage of the girl immediately returned.

She rose from her knees and sat upon one of the seats.

"I am very silly to give way to my fears in such a foolish manner," she said.

"But when I discovered that I was adrift in the boat, a terrible fear took possession of me, and I hardly knew what I did."

Turning the prow of the boat toward the shore Clinton guided the craft to the land, swimming in its rear; and as the girl sat facing the stern he had a good view of her.

She was very pretty, with a long, oval face, regular features, great blue eyes and blonde hair, beautiful enough to melt the heart of a hermit.

But she was dressed very plainly—poorly, in fact, and her garb added nothing to her charms, which is not generally the case with woman-kind.

When the shore was reached the maiden leaped out upon the strand, and our hero, pushing the boat high up on the ground, so that the tide-water would not be apt to float it off, came out of the water, dripping wet, of course.

But, as he hadn't been at all dry when he went into the river, it didn't make so much difference; but when the girl surveyed him she immediately set up a cry of dismay.

"Oh! isn't it dreadful? you are wet through?" she exclaimed.

"Well, I am not so dry as I might be," Clinton replied, with a smile.

"My house is only a short ten minutes' walk from here, and if you will come up there I will be able to give you a suit of dry clothes. It is not a very good suit; it belongs to a young man who rented a spare room that we happened to have, and after a while he ran in debt and then ran away, leaving this one suit of clothing behind."

"He was just about the same size as yourself, and I feel sure they will fit you."

Gladly Clinton accepted the offer, for he was in a predicament from which he could see no easy means of escape, but this offer afforded him an opportunity to assume a new disguise.

He was satisfied now that his former one had been penetrated by the cunning rascal whom he had essayed to trap, and therefore there wasn't the least use of trying that line again.

"How did it happen, miss, that your boat was without oars?" Clinton asked, as they walked up the shore, he having, at the girl's request, made the boat fast to a tree before starting.

"It was all my own stupidity," she replied. "The boat belongs to a neighbor, and I have the use of it whenever I want it; and so once in a while I come out early in the morning and generally succeed in catching a nice mess of fish; but this morning, after untying the boat, I was foolish enough to get in without the oars. Of course, I hadn't any idea that it would float off, but it did while I was fixing my fishing-tackle."

Around the point on the strand were the oars, and the girl pointed out the little shanty where they were kept, and the young actor placed them in the house.

"The boat is all right where she is," the maiden remarked. "Mr. Calvert, who owns her, often places her there."

"That is my house," and she pointed to a small cottage, which, in company with two others, was situated upon a little tongue of land which jutted out into the river.

"It is not very large, but it answers for my mother and myself; there are only two of us, we are not rich, the rent is cheap, and so we manage to get along."

New York Nat looked at the girl with increasing interest.

She was pretty, modest and intelligent and yet making her home in an abode only fit for some poor workman with a large family and small pay, forced to practice the closest kind of economy.

"Pardon me if I offend by my plain speaking, but really it seems to me that you ought to be able to find some better accommodation than this," Clinton remarked.

The girl colored a little, hesitated before she replied, and then said:

"I am aware that it is a very poor place, indeed, but poor people must live where they can."

"You remember the old adage, 'beggars mustn't be choosers,' and although my mother and myself are not exactly beggars, yet we sometimes have a hard struggle to get along. I am a scarf-maker by trade, and often for a month at a time I haven't any work, and as I cannot get a chance to lay up much money when I am busy, a few weeks of idleness soon makes away with my little savings."

"Your mother, I presume, is not able to work?" Clinton remarked, taking a deep interest in the girl's story.

"No, sir, she is not very strong."

And as she answered the question she spoke in such a way that it was evident to the young man that the subject was not a pleasant one, and so he forbore to say anything more about it.

The girl conducted him into the cottage, which was very plainly furnished, but everything was scrupulously neat and clean.

A little room extended out from the back of the house, and the girl opening the door, showed where a well-worn suit of clothes hung on the wall.

The suit was complete, a lawn tennis shirt, a round soft hat and a pair of low-cut shoes, the stockings even were not missing.

"I will buy the suit of you; as the owner was in your mother's debt, and has abandoned the clothes, you have a perfect right to sell them."

"Oh, sir, I wouldn't take any money from you after the service you have rendered me, but—" and the girl hesitated and looked a trifle confused.

The young actor understood. This was where the mother came in.

The girl would scorn to sell the suit to the man who was obliged to use them because he had done her a service, but she judged that her mother would not be troubled by any scruples.

"Well, I will talk to your mother upon the subject," he observed.

"Yes, I suppose you will have to," she said evidently embarrassed.

"You will stay and have some breakfast with us I hope?" she continued as Clinton approached the door of the room, and then she colored up again, for it had suddenly occurred to her that there wasn't much of anything in the house for breakfast.

The larder was bare with the exception of a little salt pork and a loaf of bread.

"I asked you to stay to breakfast," she exclaimed in charming confusion, "but I declare there isn't anything in the house fit to offer you."

"A cup of coffee and a slice of bread is about all the breakfast I ever eat," he declared.

"Oh, you can have that easily enough."

That will do then.

"Well, I will get the breakfast right away."

So Clinton went into the room and changed his wet clothes for the dry suit while the girl bustled about the room and prepared the meal.

When the young actor came out, he looked like a different man, a "smug-faced clerk," out for a holiday, or something of that sort.

A middle-aged lady was in the room; we may say middle-aged, for though she was only forty, she looked to be over fifty.

She had once been beautiful and there was still a striking resemblance to the daughter perceptible, but care and a fretful spirit had sadly disfigured the face.

"How may I call your name, sir?" the girl asked as Clinton made his appearance.

As the young actor had assumed another disguise he judged that it would be wisest to take a name to suit it and so on the spur of the moment he answered that his name was Richard Darke.

"This is my mother Mrs. Bellwinkle, Mr. Darke," said the girl introducing the old lady.

Clinton for a moment was amazed by this unexpected disclosure.

Fortune was favoring him evidently, for the chapter of accidents had thrown him in the way of the mother and daughter of the murdered man, the very couple whom he had determined to find.

"My daughter has explained to me how you happened to assist her this morning and I feel duly grateful," the mother said, in a peevish, fretful sort of way.

"If I was situated as I once was I would reward you handsomely, but as it is I will do something for you one of these days when I come into my property."

CHAPTER XII.

A CLEW AT LAST.

A SHADE passed over the fair face of the girl, as she listened to her mother's words. It was plain that the peculiar manner in which the elderly lady spoke pained her.

"The gentleman doesn't want anything, mother," she hastened to say.

"The young man," retorted the other, laying particular stress upon the words.

"We never know how soon the time will come when we may want something, and the wise man will never refuse anything that is offered him."

"I am not as rich now as I once was, but when my husband returns from California we will be wealthy again."

Thanks to the knowledge which he possessed of the early history of the lady, her present condition was understood by Clinton.

With age a certain degree of childishness had come, and the husband whom she had so rashly married and as readily abandoned, with the lapse of years had been exalted to a hero who would some day return from the shores of the golden Pacific laden with wealth.

"So you need not worry, young man; if I do not reward you now, you may rest assured I will not forget you," the old lady continued, with all the graciousness of a queen.

"And when the proper time comes and my wealth returns, I will see that you are properly paid."

"It is really perfectly awful that a lady of my birth and breeding should be reduced to living in such a miserable hovel as this wretched den," and Mrs. Bellwinkle cast a disdainful glance around her at the humble apartment as she spoke.

"It is a very comfortable little house, I am sure," the young actor observed, perceiving that the old lady expected him to say something.

"Possibly there may be people who could be content to pass their lives in such a den, but I am a Beekman, and if you are acquainted with the history of the old New York families, you must know that we are one of the oldest and most distinguished of the Knickerbocker families."

"Oh, yes, I have always understood that such was the case."

"I was reared in the lap of luxury, so to speak, and never knew in my young days what it was to want for anything," the elderly lady continued, swelling with conscious pride.

It was not often that she was fortunate enough to get hold of anybody whom she conceived to be intelligent enough to comprehend her old-time stories.

From the commonplace garb worn by the young man, she had jumped to the conclusion that he did not amount to much, and therefore was inclined to patronize him.

She was a woman who had never been gifted with much acuteness, and the lapse of years had not strengthened her perceptions.

"I was a foolish, headstrong girl, though, in

my youth, and did not know when I was well.

"I fell in love with a gentleman who, although he came of a good family, was not my equal, socially speaking.

"I married him, though, notwithstanding this fact, but my family made such a dreadful time about it that they contrived to separate us."

"That was very unfortunate," Clinton ventured to remark.

"Yes; I was weak and foolish," Mrs. Bellwinkle observed, with a doleful shake of the head.

"And my father was a man possessed of a dreadful temper and an indomitable will, and I knew that if I did not yield to his demand, it would certainly lead to some dreadful tragedy."

"No doubt, no doubt," the young actor coincided.

"So I came back to my home again. My husband and I had eloped, and it created a great deal of talk at the time," the old lady added, with a great deal of self-satisfaction.

"Yes; I can readily understand that."

"My husband, in despair at my loss, went to California, and there he has prospered greatly, and I am looking for him to return soon, and then my daughter and myself will leave this miserable hovel and occupy a house more suitable to our station in life."

Clinton caught eagerly at the chance to obtain some information which would have a tendency to throw some light on the dark tragedy in which he had become so strangely involved.

But was the statement a true one?

Did the old lady know that her husband had prospered in the new land by the golden shores of the far Pacific?

He doubted it, for the statement made by the dying man was yet fresh in his memory, and Bellwinkle had most emphatically stated that there hadn't been any communication between himself and the Beckmans since his enforced departure from the city, twenty years before, and that they were in absolute ignorance in regard to his acquirement of wealth.

But as he reflected upon the matter, revolving the subject quickly in his mind, an idea, which he thought might solve the mystery, occurred to him.

The old lady, in her innocence, had made the acquaintance of some dark, plotting villain, and he had been induced by the tales she told in regard to her husband's success in the golden land, to look into the matter. He made the discovery that the romance, which she had weaved out of the idle fancies of her mind, had a solid foundation of truth.

Bellwinkle had prospered in California, and was a wealthy man, but as she had never heard a word from him, there wasn't the slightest reason in the world for her to think so.

Clinton thought the matter out in this way.

Deceived by the idle romance of Mrs. Bellwinkle, some scoundrel, who, by reason of his abilities, ranked as a master-rascal, scented that there was money in the affair.

He went to San Francisco, and was smart enough to find Bellwinkle, had followed him to New York, and the affair had culminated in the stabbing affray in the Old Bowery Theater.

But now where was the scoundrel going to "come in?"

That was the question the actor-detective put to himself, and upon the answer the solution of the mystery depended, in his opinion.

Bellwinkle had been killed that his money might descend to his wife and daughter; but as far as Clinton could see now, the crime didn't bring the man who did the murderous deed any nearer to the gold.

In what manner did he expect to profit by the bloody act?

Evidently there was some deep-laid plot.

Where was the man?

"It will be quite a delightful change," Clinton remarked, with the idea of extracting more information from the lady.

"Oh, yes; this is a sort of purgatory that we are passing through now, and heaven lies beyond," Mrs. Beckman replied.

And then the old lady shot a severe glance at Albertine, as the daughter was called.

"We might have been out of this miserable hole long ago if daughter had only chosen to be sensible."

The color mounted into the girl's cheeks, and she looked both confused and annoyed.

The actor-detective felt that he was on the point of hearing an important disclosure, and so he endeavored to lead the old lady on, but if it had not been for the circumstances of the case, he certainly would have been touched by the

girl's confusion, and would have proceeded no further in the matter.

"Well, ma'am, young people will be rash and inconsiderate sometimes," he remarked.

"Your daughter ought to be guided by your counsel, for you have seen a great deal more of the world."

"Yes, I should say so!" Mrs. Bellwinkle exclaimed, tartly.

"But it isn't of the least use to attempt to reason with young people nowadays. They know better than their elders, and will not take advice."

If Clinton had not been pursuing a certain object so closely, he would have come to the rescue of the attacked girl by reminding the lady that in her youth she had not accepted the advice which had been so freely tendered her, but, in her wild and weak infatuation for the gardener, had flown in the face of all counsel; but, as it was, he held his peace and merely nodded, as though he fully agreed with the old lady.

"My daughter here is sought in marriage by a perfect gentleman—a man with enough to give her all the luxuries that the heart of a woman could possibly crave; a man, you know, with a million, and who is madly in love with her, and yet this silly child is idiot enough to say that she does not believe she can possibly bring herself to care for him, and therefore cannot become his wife, just as if a silly whim of that kind ought to be allowed to stand in the way of a girl's settlement in life!" Mrs. Bellwinkle exclaimed, severely.

The girl's cheeks were in a flame, while the sleuth-hound could hardly conceal his satisfaction. Here was a motive for the removal of the unfortunate Bellwinkle.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REGULAR SWELL.

THE young actor was well posted in detective lore.

The French detectives, presumed to be the keenest sleuth-hounds in existence, have always gone upon the idea:

"When a crime is committed, use all efforts to find the party who will profit most by the deed."

It is their belief that in nine cases out of ten this person will be the one who either committed the deed or hired tools to do the work.

And in this case, from the very beginning, upon such a theory the actor-detective had proceeded.

It had seemed to be a blind trail that he was following, but now, all of a sudden, there appeared to be a glimmer of light.

This wealthy man—this swell suitor who was so anxious to marry the beautiful, but poverty-stricken Albertine, was it not within the bounds of probability that he was some species of scoundrel masquerading under false colors?

Was he not the man who, deceived by Mrs. Bellwinkle's fairy tales about her husband, had made the trip to San Francisco, to discover there, that the fiction of an idle woman's brain was by a strange coincidence the truth?

The sequence then was plain.

Bellwinkle dead, all his wealth, with the exception of the small share which the law gives to the wife, would come to Albertine, and by marrying her the scoundrel would come in for the money.

The sleuth-hound was satisfied that he was on the right trail now.

Clinton shook his head gravely, as though he found it difficult to believe that any young girl could be so foolish.

"Yes, a perfect gentleman!" Mrs. Bellwinkle repeated, "and he is just rolling in money, too, but this stupid girl chooses to be disinclined to accept his suit, simply on account of a little foolish bit of sentiment."

"I do not care for the gentleman, mother, and I don't think I ought to marry a man whom I am sure I can never love as a woman ought to love her husband," the girl replied, respectfully, yet firmly, and the bright red spots which burned in her cheeks showed that she was fully roused.

"Oh, that is all stuff and nonsense!" Mrs. Bellwinkle retorted, severely.

"You would learn to like him in time, of course. This idea that a girl must be over-head-and-ears in love with the man whom she is going to marry is ridiculous."

At this point a bright idea occurred to Clinton.

Of course he was extremely anxious to discover who the "wealthy" gentleman was, who was so anxious to bestow fortune upon the lovely Albertine; it was his game though not to arouse suspicion by any open questioning, but

now a thought of how the matter might be arranged came to him.

"Perhaps, ma'am, you might be able to do me a favor," he said.

"Hearing you speak of this gentleman suggested it to my mind. I am out of work just now and possibly he might be able to make a place for me in his establishment if you would be kind enough to speak a good word for me."

A shade passed over the face of the girl and she turned her head away as though she would rather not listen to any discussion of the subject.

While it was not exactly a case of love at first sight, yet she had taken more interest in the young stranger who had come so timely to her rescue than in any other gentleman whom she had ever encountered, and the idea was extremely repugnant to her that he should be forced to take an humble position in the household of the man for whom she had a decided aversion.

From the first she had not liked her suitor; exactly why she could not have told.

All she knew was that the feeling of dislike existed and although she had tried hard to listen to her mother's counsel and banish it, yet she could not.

"Why, certainly, I shall be glad to speak for you," replied Mrs. Bellwinkle, delighted at the chance to play the patroness.

"And I haven't the least doubt that he will contrive to find a place for you if I speak, because he has said a dozen times that he would be glad to do anything to oblige me."

And just at this point Mrs. Bellwinkle happened to glance out of the window near which she was sitting.

"Why, if here isn't Mr. McArthur now!" she exclaimed, and she rose, hastily, to receive the visitor.

By the expression of annoyance which appeared on the countenance of the girl, it was plain that the announcement of the visitor gave her pain rather than pleasure.

Mrs. Bellwinkle opened the door and received the new-comer in the most hospitable manner.

"Good-morning, Mr. McArthur!" she exclaimed. "I hope you are quite well this morning?"

"Oh, yes, I am quite well, thank you, and I hope you are the same," responded the gentleman as he entered.

The visitor was a medium-sized man, muscularly built, with an elaborately curled head of blonde hair and luxuriant side-whiskers, mustache and imperial of the same hue.

In fact he had so much hair on his face that his features could not be distinctly made out, and the moment the actor-detective looked at him he came to the conclusion that the removal of the extravagant growth of hair would totally change the appearance of the face.

Then he had a pair of eye-glasses stuck on his nose and this helped to change his appearance from what it would have been without them.

Clinton, by reason of his profession, was an adept at all sorts of disguises, and after he had taken a good look at the man came to the conclusion that he was not appearing in his own proper person, and after a second inspection the idea crept into his head that there was quite a resemblance between this wealthy McArthur and the High Toby crackman, Black Tom Jones, who introduced him to the dogs, the warmth of whose greeting was fresh in his memory.

McArthur fixed an inquiring glance at the young man and then glanced at Mrs. Bellwinkle as much as to ask what the young man was doing there.

The lady made haste to explain.

She related how her daughter had drifted away in the boat and explained her rescue by the young man.

Although Clinton felt morally certain that he was face to face with Talmon Macard, the man who as Black Tom Jones had led him into a trap, yet he never flinched under his scrutiny.

He had confidence that as he was at present, the arch scoundrel would not be apt to recognize him, and if he could only succeed in gaining admission to the stronghold of the rogue he could succeed in delivering him into the hands of justice.

After Mrs. Bellwinkle had finished her explanation she ventured to speak a good word for the stranger, stating that he needed work.

McArthur, in his languid way said he would be glad to assist the young man who had had it in his power to be of service to Miss Albertine.

He needed a bright young fellow in his stable and if he knew anything about horses he was welcome to the position.

"Oh, yes, I am used to horses," Clinton re-

plied, jumping eagerly at the chance to gain admission into the house of the man whom he suspected.

"And do you think you would like the situation?"

"Yes, sir, I would be very glad indeed to get it," the other replied, carrying out to the life his assumed character of a young man who aspired to nothing better than a servant's position.

"I shall feel obliged to you, Mr. McArthur, if you can do something for the young man," Mrs. Bellwinkle remarked in a lady, patronizing way.

"He was prompt in trying to aid my daughter when she was apparently in a perilous position, and I think he deserves to be rewarded."

"Well, I wasn't looking forward to any reward, ma'am," our hero explained.

"I only did what I thought was right, but I would be very glad to get a good place all the same though."

"I do not doubt that you will suit me and if you do you will not have any reason to complain of the situation for the duties are light and the wages good," McArthur remarked.

"I am going to my house now and if you will come with me I will introduce you to my coachman under whom you will serve."

"I am very much obliged, sir, and I am sure I will do my best to give satisfaction. I am very thankful to you, ma'am, for speaking to the gentleman for me," he continued, addressing Mrs. Bellwinkle, who acknowledged the speech with a patronizing nod as much as to say.

"Oh, it's of no consequence, you know," Albertine's bright eyes were fixed upon Clinton in an inquiring way, just as if she was puzzled at something and was seeking an explanation.

Clinton noticed the glance, and guessed why the young lady was perplexed.

She was a bright girl, possessed of a great deal of discernment, and had noticed the change which had taken place in Clinton's manner since the appearance of McArthur on the scene.

Believing that he was in the presence of a master-roguer, a man who could assume almost any disguise, and therefore would be particularly acute in detecting anything of the kind when it fell under his notice, he was on his guard and had talked in a different manner.

He could see that the girl was rather disappointed on finding him so prompt to accept a menial position in McArthur's household, but under the circumstances it was impossible for him to explain to her that he was playing a part.

After a few more words McArthur took his departure, and Clinton followed demurely at his heels.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN A TRAP.

"Let me see; I didn't hear your name, I believe," the gentleman remarked, after they had crossed the railroad-track and entered upon the street, and as Clinton, glancing around as he walked along, recognized that it was the same street down which he had been hunted so fiercely on the previous night.

"Darke, sir—Richard Darke. Most everybody calls me Dick, though, sir."

"Yes, yes; quite natural under the circumstances," the gentleman remarked, with an approving nod.

"Well, Dick, if you are the right kind of man, you will have a pleasant place with me. I keep three horses, and my coachman has been grumbling for some time at the extra amount of work which has been put upon him since I bought a trotter, and I've promised him that as soon as I came across a likely young man I would engage him as an assistant."

"Well, sir, I've always been counted a likely lad among horses, and I think I will be able to give you satisfaction."

"Anyway, I'll do my best."

The gentleman gave another approving nod.

"That is just the way I like to hear a young man talk; it shows a proper spirit."

"Well, none of my bosses ever complained much on me," observed the young actor, carrying out his assumed character to the life.

"I allers do my best, and a man can't do more."

"Of course not—of course not," and the gentleman rubbed his hands softly together and smiled upon Clinton in such a benignant way that the suspicions of the disguised spy were at once excited.

"I am beginning to believe that my gentleman is too gracious," Clinton muttered to him-

self, under his breath, as he plodded along just in the rear of the other.

"Can it be possible that he has discovered that I am in disguise, suspects I am a spy and is leading me into a trap?"

The supposition did not seem to be a probable one, for the young actor felt he had played his part so well that, unless the man whom he was striving to ensnare was possessed of almost superhuman shrewdness, it was impossible for his disguise to be penetrated.

"At all events I will be on my guard," the amateur detective muttered to himself.

For the next five minutes the two proceeded in silence, Clinton keeping a close watch around him, and every now and then recognizing some object which he remembered to have passed on the preceding night during his hasty flight to the river.

"We must be pretty near the house where I was received so warmly last night," the actor mused, as he followed in the rear of the elegantly-dressed Mr. McArthur.

And then a sudden idea occurred to him.

"By Jove! I never thought of that before!" he murmured, "but the chances are about a hundred to one that I am going to the same house, from the grounds of which I departed so hastily last night."

And as the thought came into his mind his eyes caught sight of the mansion, where the cracksmen, Black Tom Jones, had involved him in such a preciousness only a few hours ago.

"Of course; not the least doubt about it," he mused, communing with himself, and following right in the rear of the gentleman so as to command a good view of the surroundings without attracting the other's notice.

"I see the whole game now just as well as if I had planned the scheme myself," he continued.

"The scoundrel took me to his own house, got me in the yard and then let the dogs loose, with the pleasing anticipation that they would make mince-meat out of me, and if I hadn't had the luck to get the best of the fight, there isn't the least doubt that they would have done so."

"Now I must be doubly on my guard, because if the fellow has penetrated my disguise he is leading me into some other nice little trap, which will be certain to damage my precious person if he succeeds in springing it upon me."

"But then if he doesn't suspect, and hasn't an idea that I am a spy in disguise, I may be able to arrange a little surprise party for him that will be apt to astonish his weak nerves."

It was as Clinton suspected.

The house to which McArthur conducted him was the same mansion that Black Tom Jones had proposed to crack on the preceding night.

The gentleman led the way to the stable, which was an elaborate building in the rear of the mansion.

The house was surrounded by extensive grounds, and everything about the place was in excellent order.

"The idea that a scoundrel of the style of this Macard should be able to keep up such an establishment as this," Clinton murmured to himself as he followed his companion past the mansion, and glancing in at the windows noticed that it was furnished in a most luxurious manner.

As will be seen from the reflections of our hero, which we have chronicled, there was no longer a doubt in his mind that the elegant Mr. McArthur was no other than the desperate scoundrel Talmon Macard.

Approaching the stable, the gentleman explained:

"I invested in a trotter a week ago; I grew tired of taking other men's dust on the road, and I concluded to get a horse which would be able to hold its own with the best of them."

"Cost a cool five thousand dollars and can trot pretty close to two minutes."

"Of course such a horse requires special care, and that is just what my coachman is grumbling about."

"He declares that it is fully one man's work to properly look after such a horse and he can't do it and attend to the other horses also."

"So I told him I would get a man to look after the trotter as soon as possible."

"I'd be glad to take the job, sir," Clinton remarked.

The man talked so earnestly about the matter and seemed so interested in the subject, that the spy began to believe that he had made a mistake in thinking that the other suspected him.

All men have their weaknesses; even great scoundrels are not exempt from the vanities of manner, common-place men, and the disguised actor came to the conclusion that this really superior rogue had been caught by the

charm which there is to some men in the ownership of a speedy bit of horsetflesh.

If this was so, and the disguised villain did not suspect that in the young man whom he was engaging to look after his trotter he was introducing a detective into his household, the task of trapping him would not be a difficult one.

The stable was fitted up in fine style.

Many a mechanic was there in the city, receiving good wages, who was not able to provide as good accommodation for his family as this man had for his four-footed beasts.

"I keep the trotter in a loose box," McArthur observed, advancing toward a door which evidently led to a box-stall, as he spoke.

With his right hand he took hold of the key which was in the lock of the door, and the left he rested carelessly against the side of the wall.

Clinton, a couple of yards in the rear, looked inquiringly at the door, for he expected to see a horse which would be well worth the looking at.

Suddenly McArthur turned his face to him, a demoniac expression upon it, and at the same moment he pressed a secret spring in the wall which his left hand had sought.

The secret spring worked a trap-door in the floor, and on this door the unsuspecting actor stood.

Through the floor he went, and the insnarer cried:

"Down you go to death, bloodhound that you are!"

CHAPTER XV.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

CLINTON had been taken completely by surprise, and therefore had been insnared without the least trouble, despite the fact that his suspicions had been roused and he was on his guard ready to resist any attempt to do him harm.

But it was open violence that he expected, and he had not the slightest idea he was to be entrapped in any such cunning way.

Underneath the stable was a cellar such as is usually found beneath such buildings, about seven feet deep, and if the actor-detective had only fallen into this apartment it would not have materially damaged him; but under this first cellar was a second one, an underground apartment which had been arranged by this master-scoundrel for two purposes.

In the first place it served as a hiding-place for plunder of a bulky nature, which it was not convenient to dispose of at the time it was wrested from its rightful owner.

And then, in cases where the hue and cry was raised, and the chase for any member of the ruffianly band presided over by this Protean-like scoundrel became particularly active, in this sub-cellar a secure refuge could be found until the ardor of the search abated.

The second cellar was a deep one, fully eight feet in the clear, and in the excavation the ruffians had come upon a mass of rock in the center of the apartment, which they had utilized for a floor.

The trap-doors—there were two, one in each ceiling, so that the entrapped Clinton went clear through to the lower apartment when the disguised scoundrel pressed the spring which operated both of the doors at the same time—were directly over the solid rock.

Here, then, was a fall of fifteen feet, with a rocky bottom, likely to knock the senses out of any one unlucky enough to fall through the traps.

The moment the snare was sprung and the disguised bloodhound disappeared from sight, with an exclamation of triumph the decoy sprang to the edge of the hole and peered down into the darkness which reigned beneath, for there were no windows through which light came in either cellar.

Gazing down into the black void McArthur—to give him the name by which he was now known—listened attentively.

It was possible, of course, that the fall had not materially injured the insnarer, although it was not likely.

The traps had been used a half-a-dozen times, or more, since the genius of this human spider contrived them and in each and every instance the fall had rendered the victim insensible.

And so the insnarer did not have much fear that the bloodhound had been lucky enough to escape unhurt.

Not a sound could he hear, and if the victim had not been stunned by the fall it stood

to reason that he would naturally move about, anxious to discover into what sort of a hole he had fallen.

The sub-cellar was so dark that the eyes of even the keenest sighted man could not make out any object therein gazing down through the trap-doors, so McArthur was forced to trust to his hearing.

Fully five minutes he listened, and then coming to the conclusion that the fall had stunned the victim, closed the trap-doors.

As one spring opened the traps, the pressing of a second restored them to their normal condition again.

Hardly had the traps closed when the sound of some one at the stable door attracted McArthur's attention.

"If that is Mike there can be a finish made to this business immediately," he observed.

The door opened and a medium-sized, but muscular man, squarely built, with a general appearance that strongly suggested a bull-dog made his appearance.

There was a deal of evil in the heavy-jawed face, with its small, ugly eyes, coarse features, and bristle-like red hair.

The man was nicely dressed and evidently was trying his best to look respectable, but there was something sinister about the fellow and all the good clothes in the world would not have made him look an honest man.

This was the coachman.

Michael Blake he called himself, but there were few detectives in the city who would not at the first glance have recognized in him the well-known desperado "Red" Mike Dunegan, a fellow whose ugly face was to be found in almost every Rogue's Gallery in the country for Mike had followed the burglar's profession diligently in the last ten years operating all the way from Maine to California.

And Red Mike had been one of the foremost in the pursuit of Clinton when he had been hunted into the river on the previous evening.

It was something of a novelty to him to be a hunter instead of figuring as the game and he enjoyed the experience.

"You have come in the nick of time, Mike," McArthur exclaimed as his confederate made his appearance.

"How's that?" the other asked.

"I have just trapped a spy and sent him on a voyage of discovery into the lower cellar."

"That's good."

"The same fellow who escaped from us last night."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I ran across him and though he had got himself up in another disguise so that there wasn't a trace of the Englishman about him, yet, somehow, I smoked him at once."

"It's a fine head ye have!" exclaimed the other, in a tone of admiration.

"Yes, I wasn't born yesterday, and I have an idea too that the fellow suspected me, so I resolved to get him out of the way as soon as possible."

"Of course, that's the way to do it!"

"So I offered him a situation to help in the stable, he accepted eagerly. I brought him here and dumped him through the trap."

"More power to your elbow!"

"I think the fall has stunned him, for I can't hear a sound, but whether it is so or not you must go down and settle him."

"Take a lantern and put a hole through his head with your revolver with as little ceremony as though he was a mad dog."

"I'll do that same."

"I have some business to attend to in Jersey and will not be back until evening, and then I intend to put in operation a little scheme which I have contrived in regard to that girl. I want to settle the matter, so I will not go to Boston as I arranged."

"You must go on in my place; start after you finish this hound of a spy, tell the old Jew fence we will come on and do the job for two-thirds of the swag but no less. You needn't wait to see me, you know, but start as soon as you finish this spy."

"All right."

A few more instructions McArthur gave and then took his departure.

Mike procured a lantern, examined his revolver to see if it was in working order and then descended to the cellar.

By means of a trap-door, which was carefully concealed, and a flight of steps, the ruffian made his way from the first cellar to the second.

The young actor was sprawled upon the ground, evidently stunned by his fall.

"This will be an easy job," the ruffian remarked, as he set down his lantern, then ap-

proached the young man with the intention of dispatching him.

But Clinton was playing 'possum.

Thanks to his stage training which had made him remarkably agile he had escaped without more injury than a severe shaking up, and as the ruffian came up to him, he leaped upon him and with the butt of his revolver dealt the fellow a blow on the head which half-stunned him.

A couple of more hasty whacks and Red Mike sunk insensible at the feet of his assailant.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BIRD IS TAKEN.

MR. MCARTHUR sat in the little cottage apartment, together with Mrs. Bellwinkle.

It was night and the lamp burned on the table.

The gentleman had just entered and upon inquiring for Albertine had been informed that she was out on an errand.

"I am glad of the chance to speak to you alone, my dear Mrs. Bellwinkle," he hastened to say.

"Don't you think that it is about time that you talked seriously to this silly child? I confess I am really beginning to lose patience. Here, if she accepts my offer I will give her a home where she will enjoy every luxury, and you will be returned to your old station in life."

"Instead of dwelling in this miserable hovel you will reside in an elegant mansion with a multitude of servants eager to fulfil your slightest wish."

"Oh, Mr. McArthur, what a beautiful picture you paint!" exclaimed the old lady half-closing her eyes in rapture.

"And just think all this is yours if Albertine will only say the word," the gentleman urged.

"If the girl loved anybody else I could understand it, but she herself has told me that she is heart free."

"Oh, yes, there isn't the least doubt about that; Albertine has never encouraged the attentions of any young man, although there has been plenty who wished to keep company with her such as they are."

"Mrs. Bellwinkle, it is not wise in you to allow a foolish whim of a silly girl, who really is not old enough to know her own mind, to interfere with your happiness."

"Albertine manages to earn a living for you now but suppose she should happen to be sick, what would become of you then?"

"The Lord only knows!" exclaimed the mother with a shudder.

"But what can I do? I have talked and talked to the girl—tried to reason her out of her foolishness but it doesn't seem to do the least bit of good."

"I think in such a case when the comfort of the declining years of a woman like yourself is in question that it would be perfectly fair to use a little bit of strategy."

"Certainly it would!" the lady exclaimed, promptly, the wily words of the tempter having led her to the conclusion that she was a deeply abused woman.

"But the trouble is I don't know what to do. Why, Mr. McArthur, if I had my way, if she refused to do as I bid her and marry you, I would force her to the ceremony, but of course that is all idle talk for you couldn't find any one who would be willing to perform the marriage service without the girl was willing. That is, she must pretend she is, even if she isn't."

"You have keen wits, Mrs. Bellwinkle, and your words have suggested an idea to me," the other remarked, with an air of great admiration.

"I don't know as I ever mentioned it to you, but I have been troubled for a long time with sleeplessness and lately got from my doctor a medicine which has worked a perfect cure. See?"

And he took from his vest-pocket a little vial half-full of a colorless liquid.

"Ten drops of this administered in a glass of lemonade or anything of that kind will within ten minutes produce a drowsy sensation in the most wide-awake person. Now if we could find a way to induce Albertine to take a draught doctored with this—"

"I can do it easily enough!" the mother exclaimed. "When I can afford it, I always have a glass of lemonade in the evening and sometimes make one for my daughter, so there will not be any trouble about administering the dose, but I don't see what good it will do."

"I will have my carriage in waiting," he explained. "You can give me a signal by placing the lamp in the window when the drug takes effect, and then with a trusty servant you and I and he can carry Albertine to the carriage."

"We will drive directly to my house. There is a justice of the peace living up the street, a discreet man who hasn't any more money than he knows what to do with, and if his eyes are covered with a couple of ten-dollar bills, he will never notice whether the girl is asleep or awake when the ceremony is performed."

"You will be there, of course, and my servant for the other witness, so there can never be any question in regard to the legality of the ceremony."

"It is a capital idea!" cried Mrs. Bellwinkle, who, selfish almost beyond belief, thought only of the comfort which would come to her if such a scheme could be made successful.

"There isn't the least doubt that it can be arranged, and when it is all over and there isn't any help for it, the silly child will be glad that we didn't allow her foolish whims to turn us from our purpose."

"She will speedily return, I presume."

"Yes, I expect her every moment."

"Take the vial, then, prepare the lemonade, and get her to drink as soon as she comes in, or, allow about half an hour, say. That will give me time to get the carriage, and have my friend the justice at the house in readiness for the ceremony," and as he finished the speech the gentleman rose to depart.

"I will attend to it, and in after years she will thank me for doing it too, I know."

"Oh, yes, there isn't the least doubt in regard to that."

And then McArthur departed.

Ten minutes later the girl came in, and Mrs. Bellwinkle in a short time asked her to prepare a glass of lemonade.

As this was nothing out of the way, no suspicions that anything was wrong arose in the mind of the girl.

"Make one for yourself, too," the mother said.

Albertine obeyed, for her mother of late years had become so childish and quick to take offense at trifles, that the girl seldom attempted to thwart her wishes.

When the lemonade was prepared, Mrs. Bellwinkle pretended to miss her handkerchief and asked Albertine to search for it in the adjoining room.

This gave her an opportunity to put the drug into the drink.

Her hand trembled, but firm in the belief that it was all for her daughter's good, she did not hesitate.

The vision of wealth which the persuasive tongue of the tempter had caused to arise, dazzled her, and she had not the least idea that she was doing anything wrong in yielding to his request.

When Albertine returned, Mrs. Bellwinkle pushed the glass of lemonade which she had doctored over to her, then took up her own and the two sipped the pleasant compound.

Almost immediately after emptying her glass, the girl complained of feeling drowsy, but, of course, had not the least suspicion that the lemonade had anything to do with it.

Albertine was seated in a rocking-chair with a high back, and the mother said:

"Lay back and take a nap if you like."

"I believe I will, for I am so sleepy that I can hardly keep my eyes open; I was up late last night, you know, finishing my batch of scarfs. Oh, how sleepy I am!"

And then, closing her eyes, she gradually became insensible.

Mrs. Bellwinkle rose and hastened to the door, anxious to see if the gentleman was coming.

And his calculations had been so accurately made, that as she opened the door he alighted from the carriage, which had just halted at the door.

"It is all right, she is asleep," the woman said, as McArthur entered.

He closed the door behind him.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, "get on your things, put on her hat and wrap her cloak around her, and I will carry her to the carriage."

"Isn't there danger that she may wake?" Mrs. Bellwinkle asked, nervously, as she bustled around the room.

"I have provided for that," McArthur replied.

"In this bottle"—and he exhibited a small vial—"I have a powerful drug, which I will administer to her by means of a sponge, if she shows any signs of awaking."

"You need not be alarmed, it is perfectly harmless."

"Oh, I haven't the least fear."

When she had dressed herself for the street, placed her daughter's hat upon her head, and wrapped a cloak around her, McArthur took the

girl up in his arms and carried her bodily to the coach.

The night was dark, the neighborhood a lonely one, and there was not a soul stirring to take notice of this peculiar proceeding.

The driver of the carriage had evidently received his instructions, for after the party had entered the vehicle he drove off without waiting for orders.

Ten minutes' drive brought them to the McArthur mansion. The carriage halted at the side door, the coachman jumped off the box, made haste to open the door of the vehicle, then ran up the steps and opened the house door, so that his master could carry the girl into the mansion without delay.

McArthur carried his helpless burden into the library, which was on the first floor, and placed her in an arm-chair.

An old man, slovenly dressed, and whose bloated face plainly betrayed that he was a slave to drink, was seated in the room when the party entered.

"Glad to see yer—what's the matter with the gal," he said, rising unsteadily as the others entered, and plainly betraying both by speech and manner that he had taken much more liquor than was good for him.

"She is not very well, and the excitement has been too much for her," McArthur replied, as he deposited the hapless Albertine in an arm-chair.

"Fainted, hey? well, that don't make no difference; we can go 'long all the same, bet your boots. I'm a little deaf, and I never hear what half the gals say when I splice 'em, anyway!" he exclaimed, with a drunken leer.

"Prop her up in the chair, and I'll fix you in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

McArthur placed his arm around the waist of the senseless girl, and drew her upon her feet, supporting her against his form, with her head on his shoulder.

"Do you take this 'ere woman to be your wedded wife?" began the old rascal, but he got no further in the speech than this, for there was a sudden interruption which threatened to put a stop to the proceedings.

Into the room came Nat Clinton, New York Nat, and three stalwart policemen, with drawn clubs, followed him.

McArthur, the moment he beheld the man whom he had believed to be food for worms knew that the game was up, but with the bulldog-like courage which had carried him successfully through so many tight places since he began his career of crime, attempted to brazen it out.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he cried.

"Talmon Macard, alias Jones, alias McArthur and alias a dozen other names, I arrest you for murder!" New York Nat cried.

"For murder, absurd! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've got you dead to rights this time!" Clinton retorted. "Look at this!"

And then our hero produced the strange-looking knife which by such a fortunate accident had come into his possession.

"Here is the tool with which the deed was done—the knife made for you in Ohio years ago by Hank Meldrum, and which you either lost or threw away in Canal street, after you had used it to kill your victim in the Bowery theater."

"The accusation is ridiculous!"

But though he assumed a bold front yet his cheek paled slightly when the knife was so unexpectedly produced.

"I'm going to give you a chance to prove that in a court of justice!" New York Nat declared.

"Eminent doctors have examined the knife and the wound which caused the death of the man and have decided that it was some such a weapon that let out the life!"

For the first time in his life Macard—for it was Talmon Macard, the author of a hundred crimes—felt that he was cornered.

In his desperation he made a bold attempt to break through the snare which had been so deftly woven around him.

Relinquishing the girl he dashed at the policemen who guarded the doorway, and by the suddenness of the movement upset, and rushed by them.

He gained the open air, but a bullet from one of the officers struck him down.

As he had lived, so had he perished, violently. A few more words and our tale is told.

Clinton gave up the detective business, although he had succeeded so well in his first attempt, but as he remarked, the gains didn't pay for the risks.

Thanks to him the mother and daughter received the property of the dead Californian, and although the old lady was anxious in her grati-

tude to get Nat to accept a rich reward he would not take a penny.

But when Albertine urged that, in justice, he ought to take something, he said he would take her if she would consent.

Blushingly she agreed. Small task to win the love already given.

And so, happy in the love of the girl he had saved from so dreadful a fate we leave our hero, New York Nat.

THE END.

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